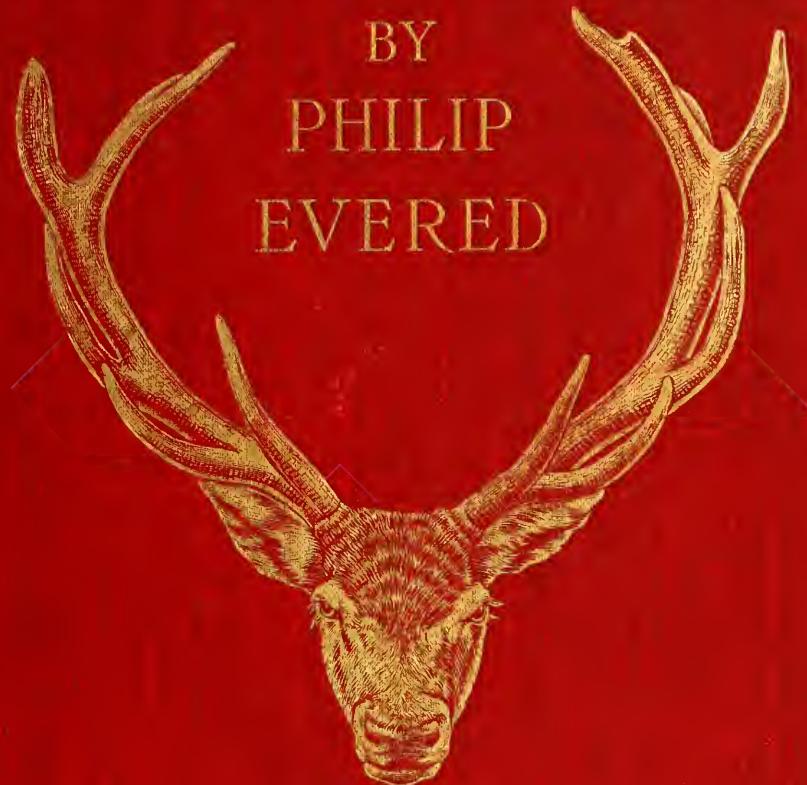


STAG-HUNTING ON EXMOOR

BY

PHILIP
EVERED





JOHN A. SEAVERNS

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STAGHUNTING
WITH THE
“DEVON AND SOMERSET.”



HUNGRY TIMES.

STAGHUNTING
WITH THE
“DEVON AND SOMERSET”
1887-1901

AN ACCOUNT OF
THE CHASE OF THE
WILD RED DEER
ON EXMOOR
BY
PHILIP EVERED.

ILLUSTRATED BY H. M. LOMAS

CHATTO & WINDUS
LONDON.


JAMES G. COMMIN
EXETER

1902

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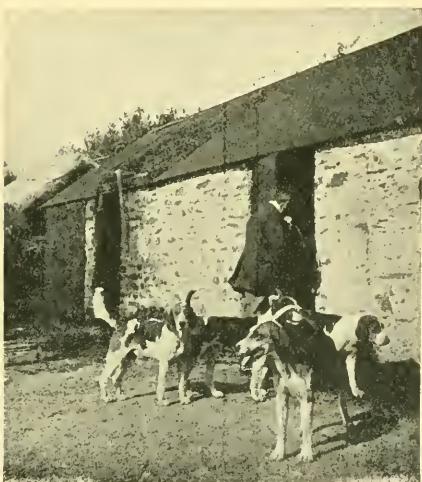


HORNER.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE CHASE AS IT APPEARS TO-DAY—A GALLOPING CAMERA—
HOW THE TYRO GETS ENTERED TO THE SPORT—WHERE
THE TRIPOD FAILS—THE LONELINESS OF EXMOOR—
ASKING THE WAY.



The present work is an attempt by collaboration of the camera and the pen, to reproduce some of those delightful scenes which fall to the lot of the favoured few who pursue the wild red deer of West Somerset and North Devon. The classics of

staghunting on Exmoor, Collyns' "Chase of the Wild Red Deer," and "Fortescue on Staghunting," have brought the general reader well acquainted with the history and origin of this noble sport, and the latter author's charming "Story of a Red

Deer" has touched a chord which appeals to all the lovers of the moor and its wild streams and woodlands; but a description of modern stag-hunting, as it survives to-day, has so far remained unattempted, except in the columns of the papers, wherein the object is rather to detail the course of each particular run, than to lead the reader through the most beautiful scenery of the wild West Country, and amongst the most stirring moments of the chase.

The difficulties of obtaining satisfactory studies of the more interesting phases of such a sport as this have only been surmounted by repeated effort and much persistence, the hazy atmosphere of the moor, the exceedingly rough and rugged nature of the ground to be traversed, and that at a high rate of speed, and the natural craft of the noble animal pursued, have all militated against the successful use of the camera. While the ordeal by photograph has become more and more familiar to all hunt officials of recent years, and while every young lady's album contains snap-shot groups taken at the meets, it is the endeavour of the author of the present volume to describe mainly those scenes when the long-legged tripod and the kodak alike are far away and "the hunt is up."

The Editor of *Country Life* has pioneered the way in reproducing scenes of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds in motion, and to his kind

permission is due the introduction of a few of the illustrations of the field in motion. While the ancient canons of the sport are as far as possible rigidly adhered to, the conditions of modern staghunting are in many respects vastly different to those under which Mr. Bisset, of famous memory, pursued his deer.

For several years past a superabundant herd, and the hard times experienced by the hill country farmers, have made it a matter of absolute necessity to take as many deer as possible with hounds, in order to save them and their companions from a much crueler fate, so destructive are their ravages among the scanty crops when urged by cold and hunger in the long mid-winter nights. Similar causes have in other times, and where there was no powerful and wealthy organization to avert disaster, led to the extermination of historic herds of red deer, but the combined efforts of the original pack and that of Sir John Heathcote Amory, appear to be fully equal to the requirements of the present time on Exmoor, supplemented, as they will be, by an ancillary establishment upon the Quantocks and possibly by another at Barnstaple.

A steady improvement in the type of horse ridden by the visitors who flock to Exmoor in the late summer and autumn makes the front rank fuller from year to year, and where the going is good and when scent is indifferent, it

is indeed a difficult task for a master to obtain and keep sufficient room for his pack, in which to hunt the foil of their nimble and wily quarry, and to puzzle out his numerous twists and turns on the sun-baked heather, or amongst the stony tracks and intricate paths of some hot and airless woodland. When once the tyro has mastered the initial difficulties of the sport his interest is aroused by the moorcraft and woodcraft displayed, or at any rate constantly exercised by the harbourer and huntsman, the whipper-in and the many others who play subsidiary parts in the long drama of an autumn day's staghunting, and if he be something more than one of those who at all times only hunt to ride, he will endeavour to see what he can of those parts of the day's doings that involve the most science and call out the most skilful manœuvres on the part of those providing his entertainment.

Of the harbouring he naturally can see little and hear less, since it has necessarily to be performed at uncanny hours, and its result kept private, lest there should be a rush of footpeople to the lair of the harboured stag and a consequent destruction of all chance of sport for the day.

Of the process of tufting he will endeavour to see what little he can, from some hill-top or other coign of vantage sufficiently distant from the huntsman to make it quite certain that no

TUFTING ON WINSFORD HILL.



harm can be done by his presence, and in this as in some other matters he will find it a vast assistance if he can enlist the good offices of one of those local sportsmen, and they are not numerous, who really know their way over the country, and at the same time understand what hounds are doing and what the huntsman's object is likely to be.

It is indeed surprising at how great a distance the slightest sign will be read aright by the trained eyesight of such a pilot, or from how far his practised ear will detect the faint echo of the horn amongst the dense green woodlands, while a print in the soil of a bridle-path or a splash on a waterside stone will convey to him no end of useful information.

When the tufting has ended and the master's horn has blown the signal that lets loose the eager pack, he will take care to get as near as he can to the actual scene of the lay on, no easy matter amongst a hurrying August field. He will recognise, if the present volume should reach his hands, some of the scenes which met his interested gaze in the last autumn of the nineteenth century : the kennelling of the pack, the trotting out to draw with the tufters, the stopping of the same, the bringing on of the pack, and the pursuit of it by himself and others over undulating plains of heath, with steep hillside paths and woodland rides to follow.

After this he will come upon some closing scenes, where the gallant quarry betook himself at last to the only refuge left him, the cooling stream, or the deep salt waters of the Severn sea. On the banks of Badgworthy, beloved of honeymooning couples, he will recognise the boulder beside which a stout forest stag breathed his last, and again on the pebble beach at Porlock Weir he will hear his spurs clinking as he scrambled down to see what manner of head the stag bore that the boat's crew were bringing in with such pride from the waters of the bay.

Exmoor in its way is a country of magnificent distances, that often indeed seem much greater than they really are, by reason of the Norwegian sort of atmosphere that generally prevails over all the wettest and boggiest expanses, and it is just those distances and the gloomy light that prevent so many a thrilling episode from becoming printed history.

Some day, perhaps, it may become possible to obtain a sun picture of one's dearest friend parting company hurriedly from his horse, the first bound of an antlered monarch of the moor as he leaps in alarm from his lair amongst the tall green ferns, the sweep of ear and stern as the pack drives across the plains of heath, or the expressions on the faces of the field, as they come suddenly and in haste upon soft ground.

While the earlier scenes of the chase are seen to more or less advantage by the greater proportion of the mounted field, and by many a score of the more enterprising of those attending the picnic meets on foot or on wheels, it is what happens later on that has a more special interest for those who for one reason or another cannot be actually in the front rank. When the great eager hounds have streamed away over the purple plains of heather at Langcombe Head, when the long extended line of bobbing heads has passed and gone beyond the distant skyline, the twang of the horn has evaded the reach of the keenest ear, the drumming of a thousand steel shod hoofs on the sunbaked peaty soil can be heard no longer, it is then that the many who are left behind, and the many who still ride the chase by the aid of memory, would fain see what is happening, as the old, old contest goes on between cervine speed and craft and endurance on the one hand, and the hounds' wondrous instinct coupled with human skill on the other.

From hill-top to combe and from splashing ford to lonely wilderness of grass and fern, by lane and field and woodland to tumbling river and deep rocky pool, the chase goes on. A gleam of sunlight between the soft grey moorland clouds throws out everything in a moment into most brilliant colouring ; what was just now

grim and sombre becomes all at once a picture so entrancing, and so full of movement by reason of a rift in the sky and the sudden advent of the chase in full cry, that it may well be carried home in the mind's eye to form food for reverie, or to lighten the dull, dark days of winter. When the elements are propitious there is no English landscape more beautiful than that of Exmoor proper, and there are times when the moor has very weird and impressive aspects, which are only seen by the very few whose occupation calls them to its lonely wilderness in times of storm and tempest, blizzard and thundercloud, or under a frosty mid-winter moon when the whole expanse lies white. While the colouring of the Quantock combes is generally more vivid, Exmoor is clothed for the most part in neutral tints, and its chief charm lies in its desolate loneliness and wide range. The network of railways which elsewhere covers English ground is here far distant ; here are no cottage chimneys at the corner of every other field : here are no busy farmsteads and creaking ploughs : only grass and rushes, heath and fern, the whistle of a nesting curlew, the harsh croak of that diligent fish poacher the heron as he flaps up disturbed from his banquet of small trout, or the whirring flutter of blackcock and greyhen as they rise with their brood from their feeding ground amongst the whortleberry stems.



SNOW CLOUDS OVER BRATTON BALL.

It may be in part the prevailing loneliness which renders the hill country farmers so cordial in their welcome to the visitor, whether he bestrides a hunter from the shires, or tramps cheerily afoot in quest of health and sport combined, but certain it is that one of the first impressions to be produced on the mind of the visitant is that of the courtesy and good nature of the inhabitants whom he meets when afield.

“English as she is spoke” on the moor is often a sore puzzle to unaccustomed ears, and the dialects encountered vary much with each watershed and county, but in time, the quaint idioms and the ways of thought of a bygone age, when steam and electricity had not yet served mankind, become familiar, and the man from “up country” can understand and make himself understood without undue delay. One point will always strike the traveller over this country of long and hilly miles and many cross tracks, that the native who answers his anxious queries can never appreciate his difficulty in understanding the directions given, or in following them out to the desired goal. The instructions that would be ample for a West Country man born and bred, are often sadly confusing to a native of a distant county or a Londoner out for a holiday, while the local estimate of distance always seems to err on the hopeful side. In the dark, or in fog, it is absolutely

necessary to get off the moor as soon as possible, if one is without a trusty pilot, no amount of general knowledge being of any avail when the usual landmarks are invisible. Alike to those to whom Exmoor is an open book, and to those to whom wild red deer are strange and unfamiliar beasts, this little book is addressed in the hope that it may present some phases of Exmoor at its best.



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MEET AT VENNIFORD CROSS.

CHAPTER II.

THE OPENING MEET AT CLOUTSHAM—THE CONCOURSE ON CLOUTSHAM BALL — THE PARADE IN THE FIELD — NOTABLE FIGURES — THE MASTER AND HIS STAFF — KENNELLING AT CLOUTSHAM FARM — THE DAY'S PROCEEDINGS — THE TAKING OF THE STAG.



MUCH has been written, and that by many an able pen, of the great annual gathering that takes place on a little rounded hill-top between Dunkery and the fertile vale of Holnicote, when for one day, at

least, in all the year "everybody who is anybody" within half a county's length makes picnic upon this spot that has seen the Devon and Somerset Staghounds in all their glory from such time as the memory of living man runneth not to the contrary. One of the chief reasons of the unfailing popularity of the opening meet is doubtless to be found in the fact that it affords the

very first opportunity after the enforced idleness of summer for the foregathering of all the various sorts and conditions of men that go to make up a modern hunting field. Then, too, nearly every master of foxhounds throughout the British Isles is as yet free from the cares of cub-hunting, and many of them wend their way to Cloutsham, where they are sure of meeting a number of their confrères. A sprinkling of American visitors are sure to be found amongst the throng by the time the pack appears, some of them tourists only, who have chanced to find themselves at Lynton or Lynmouth, or perhaps at Minehead, just at the time of this great West Country festival, and others members of Hunt Clubs in the land of the star-spangled banner. Austrians and Russians, Belgians and Germans, Frenchmen, Portuguese and Spaniards are at times to be found amongst the throng, and occasionally a "coloured pusson" or two join in the first mad rush of the season. Exmoor is a land where everything depends upon the weather, and a heavy thunder shower or two in the earlier morning hours will keep hundreds of picnic-makers and cyclists away from the meet, thereby lessening the crowd of vehicles and decreasing incidentally the dangers, as well as the humours of the traffic which for a couple of hours before mid-day pours up the rough and narrow lane from the Porlock Vale, or down the sandy

moorland road from Exford, or over the stony track that crosses the heights of Dunkery itself from the direction of Cutcombe. If the morning be showery and the dust in consequence well laid, while a fresh westerly breeze sweeps from the Atlantic straight over these moorland heights, it is surprising how fresh and bracing the air can be at this altitude of a thousand feet or so above sea level; horses that have been jaded and listless enough in the dusty and airless lanes below, arch their backs and caper on the close-cropped greensward of the hill-top; men who have felt themselves growing old and stiff amongst the heat and turmoil of London in July, forget their cares as they grip bridle-rein and saddle once more and inhale, unconsciously, ozone unmixed with coal smoke; even the cheek of beauty loses the pallor that is becoming enough elsewhere, and warms to the touch of sun and wind. Many a portent has arisen at the opening meets; a white Spanish mule has been ridden, not only into the meeting field, but also after the hounds: a German band, with brazen instruments and uniforms complete, has applied in vain for admission, for, be it remembered, the historic field and the farm and all its surroundings are private property, and are only thrown open to the Hunt and its many followers by the courtesy of the owner, Sir C. T. D. Acland. Many a four-in-hand has braved successfully the perils of the mountain

roads, and every sort of char-a-banc and brake brings its contribution of foot people to swell the throng. Some cyclists laboriously wheel their machines up the last long ascent from Horner, while others more wisely leave them in safe keeping below and climb the remaining distance unencumbered. Breakdowns and minor accidents are plentiful, but not more so than one might expect, having regard to the difficulties of the way and the curious collection of vehicles and tackle pressed into the day's service.

A few years since a newly-married barrister and his bride had the misfortune to break a leg a-piece in a carriage accident of this description, and a little later on were to be seen attending the meets on wheels, duly strapped and splinted, and were naturally the recipients of unstinted sympathy. A few ladies ride "*en cavalier*" with the Staghounds, and the art has three exponents at the present time ; it might almost be wished perhaps that the practice might become more general, so trying are the hills and the hot weather to tender withers. Tandems of all heights and sizes find their way to the meets, and the author remembers to have seen a well-appointed donkey tandem threading the green Quantock tracks, and a tandem of skewbald cobs at Cuzzicombe Post, with pairs in curricles not a few.

The time of the year being mid-August, it is not surprising that there is a great diversity of



"HOUNDS, PLEASE."

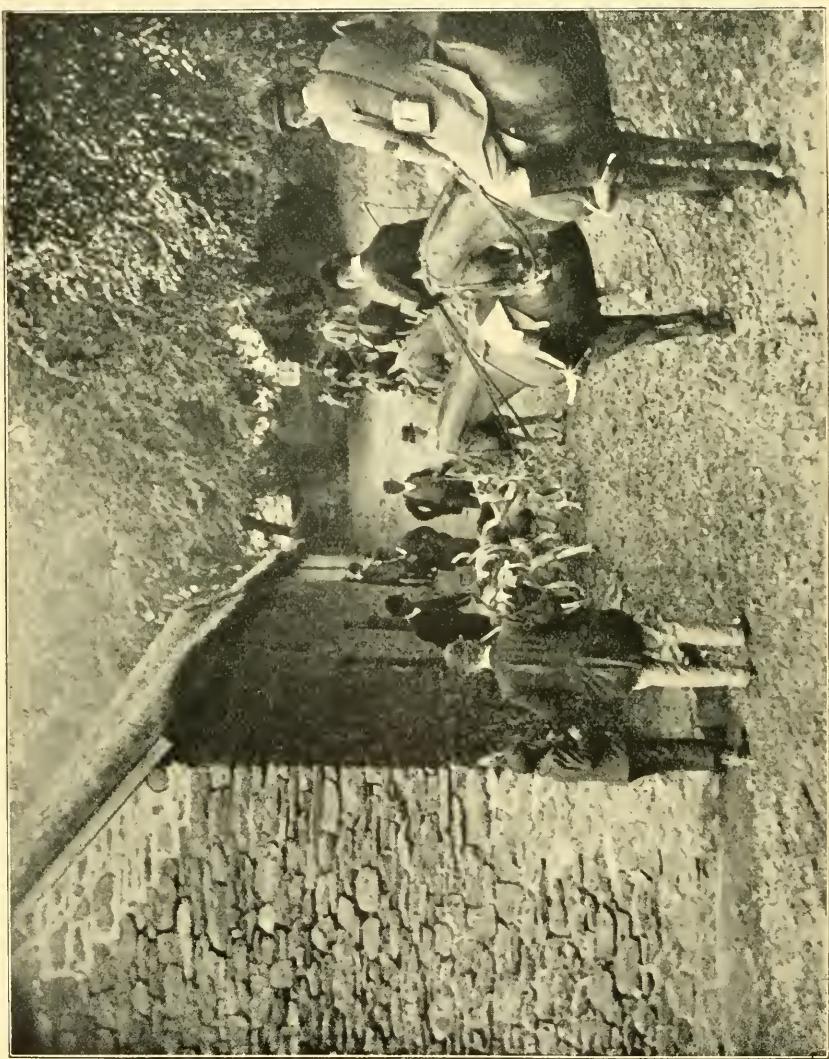
opinion as to the most suitable attire for the occasion, and inasmuch as the Hunt uniform is worn only by the master and two servants and the honorary secretary and by Lord Ebrington on certain days, all that has to be attained is a garb sufficiently cool and at the same time serviceable. Straw hats of any rigid shape are undoubtedly a mistake, as they invariably blow off directly business begins. Many ladies wear light coats of white drill, and one enterprising sportsman attired himself in a spotless suit of duck not many summers ago, and was promptly set down in the columns of the *Sporting Times* as "one clad in white samite." A few khaki garments were in evidence amongst the field in the summer of 1900, and a certain number of invalidated troopers with uniform and cowboy hats complete were to be seen.

The assemblage on Cloutsham Ball sways to and fro as interest centres now in one spot around the paraded hounds, now in another as the tufters are being drawn from the pack at the kennel door, now from side to side of the Ball as the progress of the tufting sets various deer in motion, and anon surges in a crush towards one or other of the gates of exit when the day's chase begins.

It is popularly supposed that a big run is not intended by the powers that be on the opening days, but that they sometimes take place and

are heartily welcomed by those who take part in them, will be well remembered by the one hundred and ten who saw the finish of the first run from Cloutsham in August, 1900. On this occasion a right good forest stag with four points atop took the most desired of all directions, and led his pursuers across the open, disdaining to touch covert, straight from the western end of Dunkery to the banks of Badgworthy Water.

Some years before, to wit in 1891, there was much difficulty in getting any warrantable stag away, and the pack was not released until after four o'clock, but a very fine run ensued, and a stag with three and four atop was taken at half-past seven o'clock between Combe Park and Watersmeet, where the Farley Water tumbles down from rock to rock to join the East Lyn. In 1889, too, a right royal stag with three and four atop went away from Horner to Hawkcombe, Culbone and Yenworthy Common, being set up and taken in the East Lyn under Southern Wood, after a chase of two hours and forty minutes. The time of year of course militates against great performances on these occasions : stags are still in the velvet and the extreme tips of their horns are hardly as yet set, and the plague of flies is to them a very real fact. The pace, moreover, that makes hound pant and horses sob and lather, tells with equal effect on



KENNELING THE PACK, CLOUTSHAM.

the old and heavy stag whose well filled haunch and flank bear eloquent testimony to the succulence of the ripening corn, the potatoes and apples and juicy mangold wurtzels, amongst which he has for so long made his nightly feasts, choosing alway the best with nice discrimination.

Still, if only a stag can be roused that will head for the moor, that will be the one most welcome to the master, and the ringing echo of his horn will soon be audible above the clatter of plates and glasses and the general hum of conversation as he gallops down upon the farm intent on releasing the pack.

Meanwhile there has been ample time for a general survey of the throng: and what study is so interesting as that of one's fellow man? The footpeople packed themselves in densest array where the master and his servants sat on their horses with the pack grouped in front of them on the sward about half-way down the slope of the familiar field. All the carriage horses have been taken out and tethered in long, close packed lines all down the hedgerows, or crowded together in the roomy shelter of the farm buildings, but some acres of the slope immediately below the general line of vehicles are occupied by hunters being held in readiness or moved slowly up and down until wanted. No sooner has the master given the order to kennel

the pack than there begins an eruption of table-cloths to be spread under the shade of the carriages, upon their cushions, across the knees of their occupants, and in fact in every conceivable fashion according to the entertainer's fancy.

Amongst a field so heterogeneous, and gathered from so wide a sphere, it is not surprising that to many, one of the chief delights of the day is the making acquaintance, by sight at least, with personalities never otherwise encountered, and habitués of the Hunt often find their time pretty fully occupied in answering such questions as "Oh, do tell me who that curious looking old clergyman is?" or "I say, my boy, how about the pretty lady yonder in the grey habit?" With the succeeding years it is the actors of this play who change, and not the scene: each year some well known and respected faces are seen no more: famous men in other fields perhaps are seen once or twice and then fate keeps them busily employed elsewhere: others whom memory recalls as amongst the front rank have since made name and fame and helped the growth of the Empire. Sir Alfred Milner has been entered to the sport; Sir Evelyn Wood knows the look of the moor; H.H. Prince Galitzin is quite at home with the tufters amid the mazes of the Quantock woodlands and can hold his own when the great

hounds are driving at their fastest ; the Duchess of Hamilton knows her way on Dunkery ; Sir William Karslake has for many a year been a member of the Hunt Committee, varying the toil of government at Somerset House with the welcome relaxation of a gallop over the heather and the grass ; Lord Poltimore is to be seen at the Cuzzicombe Post meets, which lie nearest to his North Molton residence at Court Hall ; Sir C. T. D. Acland, the owner of the field and of some very large slices of red deer land, is generally to be found at the first meets, and Mr. Luttrell has not far to come from Dunster Castle ; while Viscount Ebrington, the owner of Exmoor proper, chairman of the Hunt Committee and field master on those days when Mr. Sanders himself carries the huntsman's horn, is sure to be present.

Mr. Nicholas Snow, the proprietor of the famous sanctuary for deer, has come across the moor ; the member for West Somerset, Vice-Chamberlain and Treasury Whip, Sir Alexander Acland Hood, has travelled from Saint Audries ; Mr. Basset, of Watermouth Castle, and former Master of the Staghounds, is to be seen ; and the Baroness Le Clement de Taintegnies is dispensing hospitality to an admiring circle. Amongst masters and ex-masters of hounds, who naturally form a large section of the field, the Hon. J. L. Bathurst, the Hon. C. W. Bampfylde

and Sir W. R. Williams, are well-known figures at Cloutsham.

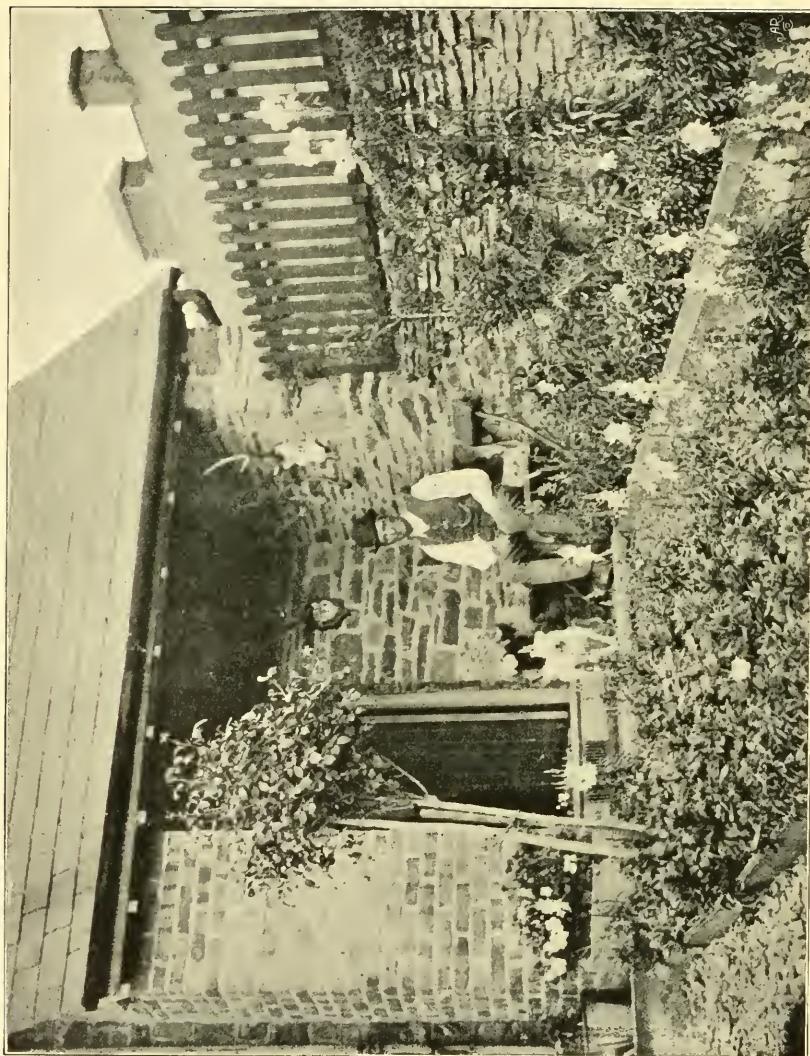
The master, Mr. R. A. Sanders, took the hounds on Colonel F. Hornby's resignation in the spring of 1895, and has increased the number of hunting days from three to four each week, being the first master to hunt the hounds himself, which he does on one of the four days while the huntsman enjoys a much needed rest after the other three. Mr. Sanders contested the Eastern division of Bristol at the General Election of 1900, and considerably lowered the previous Liberal majority. In 1901 he became an alderman of the Somerset County Council.

The field-master, Lord Ebrington, who only appears in scarlet on the fourth, or master's day, in each week, succeeded Mr. Bisset in the mastership, and held office until Mr. Basset took command in 1887.

The huntsman, Anthony Huxtable, who figures largely in the illustrations, has been in the service of the Hunt for twenty-five years, and has known five masters. He retires at fifty years of age, having carried the horn for twelve years, acted as whipper-in to Arthur Heal for nine years, with four previous years in the Hunt stables. Born in Kentisbury parish of working parents, he was brought as an infant in arms to Driver Cott, and made his first acquaintance with Exmoor, as seen from horseback, when riding on

D

ANTHONY HUXTABLE.



the pommel of his father's saddle at Larkbarrow, where the latter served for some years as bullock herd to the late Sir F. Knight. Pursuing many avocations, Anthony became in turn farm boy, milk carrier in Barnstaple, teamster, iron miner, peat cutter and drainer (in which capacity he cut many of the forest gutters that he has since had to ride over), quarryman, 'bus driver and billiard marker, showing an all-round aptitude, and directly controverting the old adage that rolling stones gather no moss. He has led the way in many notable runs. The whipper-in, Sidney Tucker, was promoted from the Hunt stables at the same time as Huxtable became huntsman, and has contributed very largely to the latter's success, and to the good sport generally shown.

The harbourer, Fred Goss, was appointed by Colonel Hornby, in 1894, on the death of Andrew Miles, and has a wonderfully successful record, one of his best achievements being the harbouring of six warrantable stags in six successive days in one week in the autumn of 1900 for Mr. Sanders and Mr. Amory.

The late Andrew Miles entered Mr. Bisset's service in July, 1862, and went to Haddon to live six years later as Lord Carnarvon's game-keeper. He harboured for twenty-five years under four masters, and located over five hundred stags, succeeding Blackmore in his important office.

The duties of treasurer, secretary and administrator of the deer damage fund are combined in the person of Mr. Philip Evered, who was elected on the resignation of Mr. A. C. E. Locke in 1894.

Kennelling the pack is a very ordinary and necessary function, and when the body of the pack has been consigned to a cool and airy building, and the desired number of hounds, generally from four to five couples in the stag-hunting season, have been called out by name by the huntsman, he leaves the kennel door and counts over the chosen draft. One of the Hunt second horsemen has his first mount, generally a tufting pony, in readiness, and the master usually takes this opportunity of checking off by name each hound that is to take part in the all-important duty of the day. Near by the harbourer is waiting, ready mounted to conduct the huntsman to the lair of the forest king, that he has been watching for hours past with the trusty Zeiss glasses, now slung from his shoulder. These glasses were presented to him by a subscription raised amongst the followers of the hunt a few years since, and are of the greatest assistance to him in his arduous and difficult calling. Through a vista of trees a gateway can be seen from the kennel door at Cloutsham, with the outline of the moor on the western end of Dunkery just visible, and it is



SIDNEY TUCKER, ON HORNER HILL.

in some such direction as that that a stag must go if he would keep to the open. Kennelling and drawing the tufters does not take long, and then the day's proceedings begin forthwith : harbourer and huntsman jog off with their nine or ten hounds to rouse the stag, while master and whipper-in betake themselves by other paths to the most advantageous spots for viewing the stag away, and for stopping the tufters until the pack and field arrive on the scene. While this is one of the most interesting parts of the day's work, it can only be seen from a distance by the field in general, as it is absolutely necessary for the Hunt servants to have the paths and woodland rides to themselves at this juncture, and, moreover, a stag may be very easily blanched at this point, and all prospect of a good day's sport ruined by an injudicious move, or the appearance of a body of horsemen between the stag's lair and the open moor.

A glowing spot of colour in the hot sunshine, one may often see, from Cloutsham Ball, Sidney Tucker sitting motionless on his horse, while Anthony draws some dense patches of covert below him on Parsonage Side. In the depths of the combe the Horner water bustles down toward the sea, which it reaches at Hurlstone Point, a bluff headland in the distance. In a few minutes, if all goes well and the harbourer has judged correctly, Sidney's attitude will change

to animation as he gallops over the roughly carpeted ground to stop the tufters, while the welkin rings with his piercing view halloo. Then with a white handkerchief he signals across the leafy depths of the East Water combe to the master, Anthony joins him on the hillside to wait by the panting tufters until Mr. Sanders brings the pack and its following multitude, and then when due law has been allowed, and the great hounds have taken up the scent and are streaming away over the purple slopes of Dunkery, he drops back to the tail of the Hunt to bring on straggling and timid hounds, so that as many of the pack as may be shall be in at the death of their noble quarry. Of the run itself, of the checks and turns, of the stratagems of the stag, of the thousand and one incidents which befall in the hurry and rush of some two or three hundred horsemen and horsewomen over a wide extent of rough water-worn hillside and moorland, subsequent chapters and their accompanying photographic studies must tell. Let us pass on to the last scene but one in the day's drama, when the gallant stag finds himself at last outwitted and outpaced, and betakes himself to his last refuge—the biggest water he can find.

At this time of year, the second Tuesday in August, the moorland streams are small and shrunken, Horner water or Badgworthy are

mere babbling streams, and their neighbours Exe and Barle have but few pools worthy of the name throughout many miles of their higher reaches.

But the deer know well where the deepest swims are to be found, for they are hot-blooded, thirsty creatures, and go down to drink and roll in the limpid streams each night as soon as darkness falls, and again finish up their nightly wanderings with a bath in some sequestered mud-pit as a slight protection doubtless against their enemies the flies.

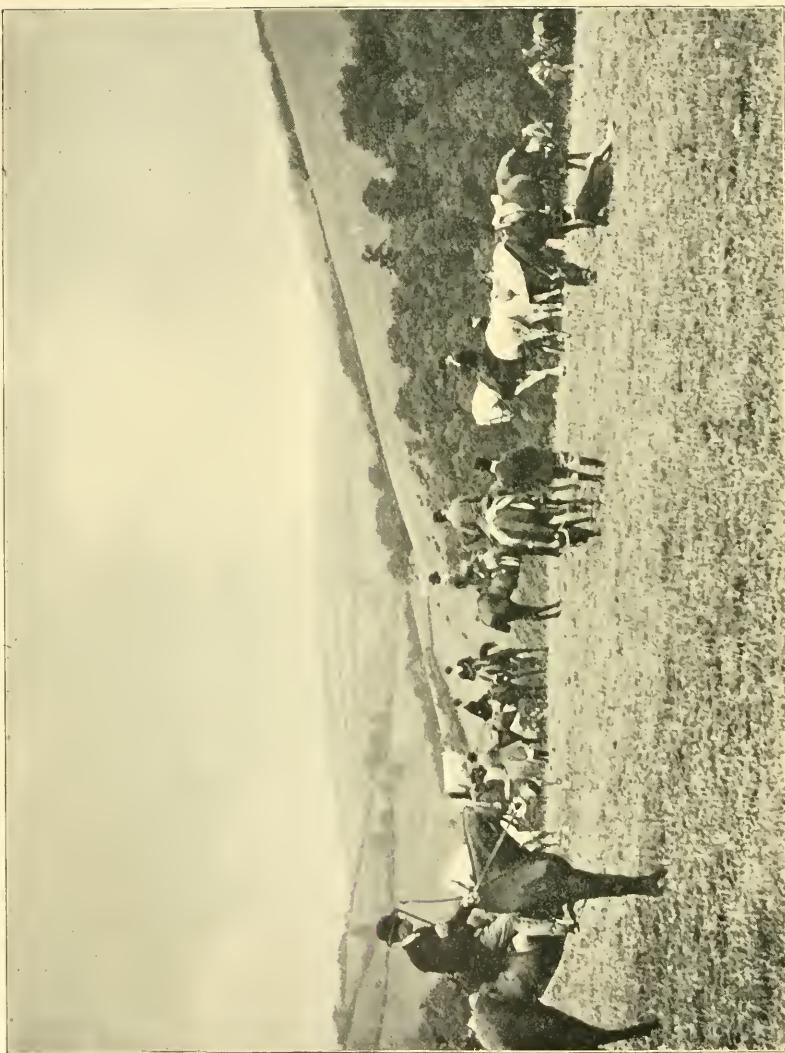
As the dreaded cry and the echo of the relentless horn draws nearer and ever nearer, the hunted stag trots wearily down the stony river bed, leaving a tell-tale splash on the rounded boulders, refreshed for the moment by his bath but with lowered head, closed mouth and heaving flank: then Sidney views him, and the wooded valley, erstwhile so silent, suddenly fills with music as the pack comes hurrying round the bend above, while the clatter of four times a hundred iron shod hoofs upon the stony riverside track rises to the topmost oaks on Ley Hill. Now some harvesters throw down their pitchforks and run from the golden stubble to the green meadows, and go yelling down the yonder bank, for amongst West countrymen those who cannot ride a-hunting dearly love to be in at the death. Running in the water while

the hounds run on the banks, the stag's stride soon shortens and he turns and stands at bay, a noble picture.

It is always the object of the Hunt staff to secure the stag and put an end to his sufferings as quickly as possible, and while the horns are still in the velvet this is no very difficult matter, especially as in hot weather hunted deer are as a rule quite exhausted when set up. But when the rivers are swollen with an October rain, and the fighting instinct is aroused in the cervine breast, capture is quite another matter, and is attended with quite sufficient danger to render it a very thrilling occupation, and one not likely to be undertaken by a novice. First and foremost in this difficult art is the welter weight of the Hunt and a member of the Committee, Mr. Philip Froude Hancock, who is equally ready to come to close grips with a fighting stag in the narrow Quantock combes, the deep cold flood of the river Barle, or amongst the mighty boulders and hanging ledges of the Countisbury cliffs. To many a pursuer of carted deer this is a moment of intense interest, when a stag with his horns on, and knowing full well that his last moment has come, is approached single-handed and deftly laid upon the ground. An instant later and consciousness has left the noble beast, and in due course the four slots are awarded by the master

to some of the many aspirants for these coveted trophies, and the two tushes become the property of some member of the field who has a fancy for a unique scarf pin or set of sleeve links. Then the hounds are sent home to Exford, the crowd slowly separates on its various homeward ways, a cart comes for the carcase of the stag, the head going to the kennels, the hide to the huntsman, and the venison to the deer preserving farmers near whose land he was found, and the lengthening shadows close over another opening day.





MEET AT CHILLY BRIDGE.

CHAPTER III.

THE DULVERTON SIDE OF THE COUNTRY—WINSFORD—
TUFTING IN THE EXE VALLEY—THE BIG RIVERS—
HADDON HILL—THE HARBOURER'S COTTAGE—HART-
FORD MILL—BITTESCOMBE—CHIPSTABLE—MOLLAND
MOOR—BURY VILLAGE—A POOL IN THE HADDEO.



THOUGH there are many parts of red deer land, and though the great stretch of hill country that lies between Barnstaple and Bridg-

water contains many separate areas where the deer mostly congregate, the two main divisions are popularly known as "the Dulverton country" and "the Moor." Now the Dulverton country lies all along the line of the Devon and Somerset railway between Wiveliscombe and Filleigh stations, which follows for many miles a singularly cold and unprofitable line of marshy vales

where clay and rushes and neglected fields predominate. From this hard and fast boundary, which the deer will not cross if they can help it, many a snug secluded combe runs up towards the moorland heights, with wooded banks and tinkling streams and deep winding lanes leading up to little lonely farmsteads, to which few but the postman and the country doctor and the valuer of deer damage know the way. The trend of the brooks is all southward; here the Tone and the Batherum, Haddeo, Exe and Barle, Brocky and Mole and Bray all tumble towards the midday sun, until at least they have dived beneath the embankment of the railway, and each river has its woodlands "where the dun deer lie."

Dulverton people are proud, and justly so, of their staunch and consistent support of the chase, and though their own moors are small and their side of the country may be termed the woodland side, still they are never better pleased than when one of their deer leads hounds all across the great stretch of West Somerset's westernmost corner and reaches the Severn Sea after a couple of hours' headlong gallop from the neighbourhood of their thriving town.

A better train service and greater residential amenities, as well as a more liveable climate, have no doubt much to say for the preference shewn for this side of the country as distinct

from the moor itself, where hunting quarters are by no means over abundant and locomotion is a matter of difficulty and serious forethought. The extreme western end of the Dulverton country forms in fact a district by itself, which might as truly be claimed as appertaining to the moor as to the woodland district, inasmuch as deer, when roused in its strongholds, betake themselves to the open quite as often as they elect a course over the enclosures. One large covert, known as Bremridge Wood, is tunnelled under by the railway, and at this point deer freely cross to and fro, and hence no doubt it is that they lead hounds far down into the heart of Devon and bring their panting pursuers to the brinks of the salmon haunted Taw, to find themselves confronted by another obstacle in the line of the London and South Western railway between Barnstaple and Exeter.

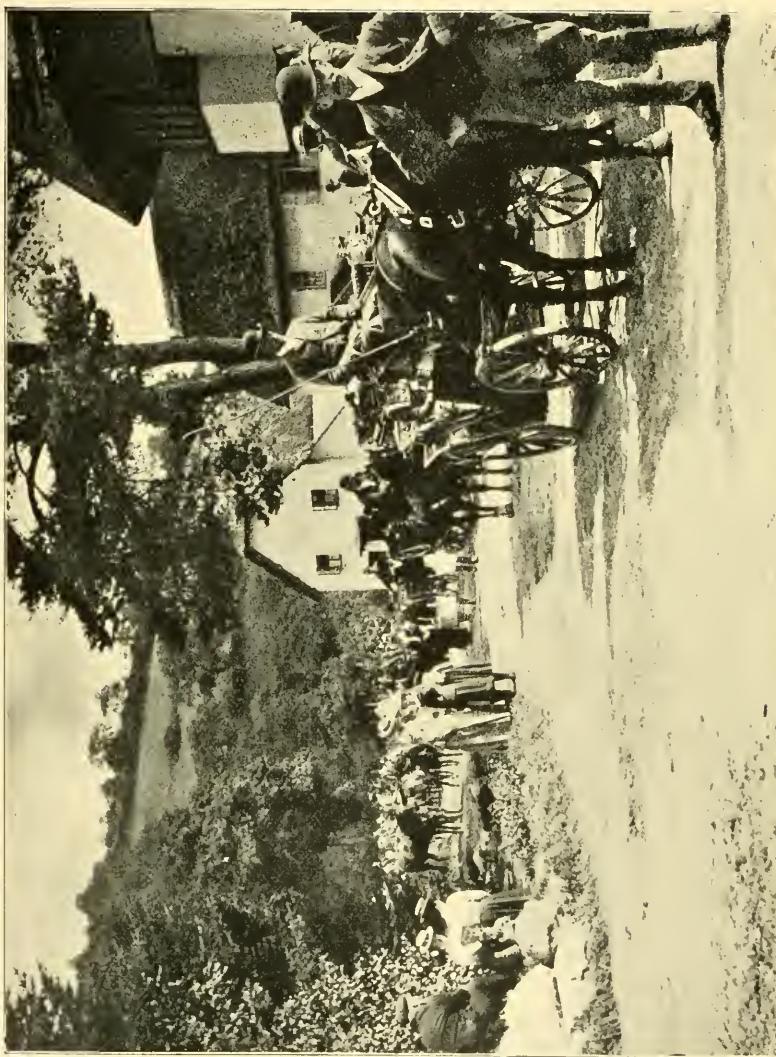
At the other extreme or eastern end, the Wiveliscombe coverts lie well in sight of the Quantock range, but with the red tillage lands of the Bishops Lydeard vale and the West Somerset railway in between, and it is only occasionally that deer head that way. Every now and then, however, they seem to remember that there was once a red deer land upon the Blackdown Hills, and try to make their way towards the tall column of the Wellington Monument; but once the deer has left his native

hills and struck out across a cultivated vale, if the hounds are anything less than an hour behind him the end is fairly certain.

In quite recent years an opening meet has been held at Haddon, on an occasion when, owing to the decease of the late Sir Thomas Acland, Cloutsham was closed ; but the space available proved barely sufficient for the concourse that assembled to celebrate the unusual event.

Of all West Country villages there is none more picturesque than Winsford, and none more truly central for staghunting. It is served too, by one of the best kept roads in the whole surrounding country, and whether one measures the average distance from the pretty thatched inn, that swings the sign of "The Royal Oak," to the meets, or to the usual places such as Horner, or Porlock Weir, or Hartford Mill, at which deer are wont to die, it is only challenged by Exford as a desirable and convenient centre. On the day of its great annual meet, however, the village becomes blocked with traffic, and it is only with the utmost care and difficulty that hounds can be piloted through the maze of vehicles when they move off to begin the day. "The Royal Oak" once witnessed a sensational finish to a run, which at the time caused much local excitement. A stag from Haddon ran by the Exe valley to the Allotment preserves, and

WINSFORD.



then, finding his strength failing him, crossed the fields of Halse farm and came down dead beat to the back of the village and rushed into the premises at the rear of the hostelry. As the leading hounds closed in, he essayed to scale a low and convenient roof, but slipping back, made the best of his way to the back entrance of the inn, and there in a gloomy passage encountered a waitress bearing a tray of glasses. Curious to relate, the tray was not dropped, and the stag seeing an open doorway, passed into the best sitting room which was prepared for guests, while the ready witted Hebe closed the door. Thus trapped, the stag was easily secured, the field watching the proceedings through the narrow window panes. The Winsford villagers have been born and bred amongst the deer, they are never far away from their sight and thoughts, and they are always anxious that, on their great day of the year, a warrantable stag should be forthcoming, and if possible should be induced to break from the silent recesses of Burrow Wood and should cross the ferny slopes at the foot of the Devil's Punch-bowl, where the assembled field of horse, foot and carriage folk may look down from the heights above and get a bird's-eye view of the whole affair. Old stags, however, are most peculiar in their likes and dislikes, and not unfrequently, after harbouring in a particular covert

for several years in succession, will unaccountably desert it for a number of years, to again take to it long after the original tenants have met their fate, and have left only their heads to adorn the walls of castle, manor house, or shooting box.

Sir Thomas Acland's beautiful stretch of heather that runs from Comer's Gate to Red Cleave is perhaps the very soundest of all the glorious galloping grounds with which Exmoor abounds ; the heath is short and rabbit holes are few and far between, and except for Bradley Bog there are hardly any quagmires to be found. Surrounded by coverts large and small, the deer have ample shelter and have the wooded valley of the Barle in easy reach, while the Hawkridge strongholds form a sure retreat to which a quarter of an hour's gallop will bring their flying feet.

The Exe valley, by which the county road follows the winding of the river below Winsford, becomes very familiar indeed to the field towards the end of the average staghunting season, for the reason that every stag that finds himself hard pressed in the Dulverton country is morally certain to pass between Chilly Bridge and Weir on his way to or from the great Haddon woodlands. One of the worst points of this same valley, from the hunter's point of view, is the very fact of its excellent road, which, on





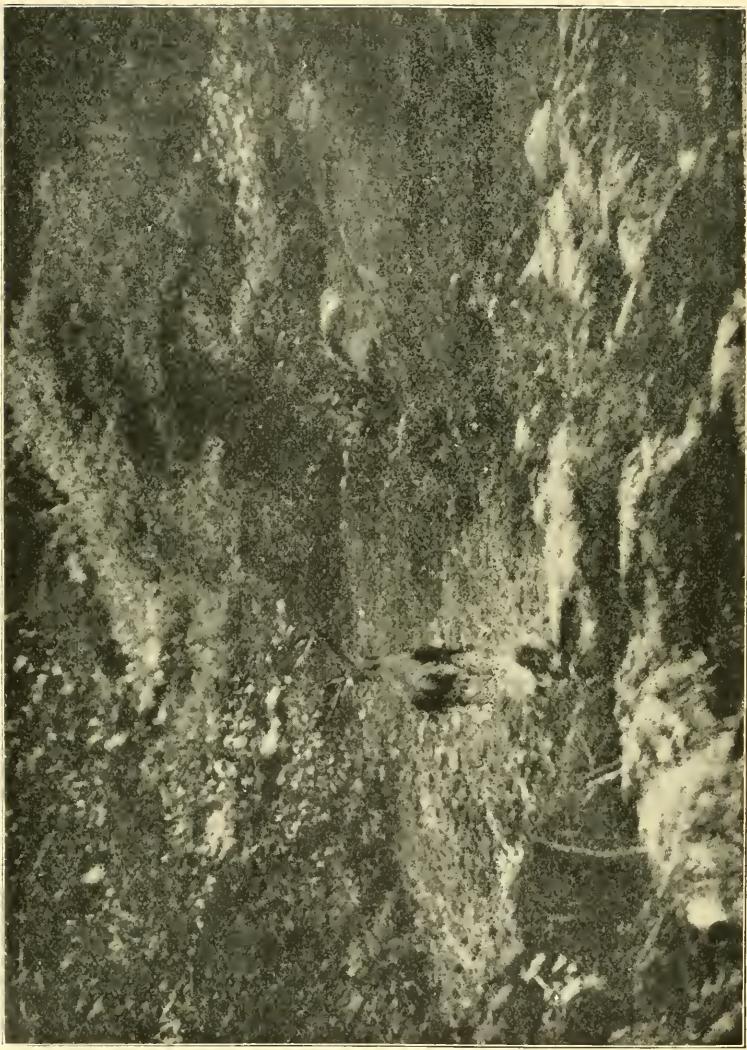
COMING OVER DUNKERY,

a sweltering August afternoon, well sheltered from every possible breath of air and baked with pitiless sun glare, produces a cloud of dust that must be seen and felt to be duly appreciated. For a long two miles river and road wind ever side by side down this romantic valley, while the great woods overhang the depths, reaching on one side in one continuous chain of dense greenery that touches the sky line, and falls with great abruptness right down to the dancing water. While the great hounds push on through the cool, shady depths, following the warm foil along the winding deer paths between the tree stems, the field cannot well avoid packing together on the hard, high road, inasmuch as it is necessary to leave the woodland hunting tracks to the huntsman.

Certain favourite places there are where a view of the hunted deer can generally be obtained, and a close view of the chosen animal is sometimes of great importance in staghunting, inasmuch as there is no animal more cunning in shifting the burden of pursuit to his friends when he thinks he has had enough of it himself. These viewing places generally have their complement of foot people, who on fine days in autumn show great interest in the sport, and in many parts of the country on each successive season the same fields and trees have the same occupants.

In the Brayford country this is particularly noticeable, the coverts there being separated by steeply sloping pastures, where the villagers congregate in highly interested groups, and are generally anxious that the stag of the day should not go straight away to the moor, but should double to and fro amongst the woods and thus give them plenty of opportunity to witness the chase. On the Quantocks again, the line of the Stowey road, proverbial for its collection of pedestrians, and the early British earthworks upon the summit of Danesborough, always find favour. Another spot that is never untenanted when hounds meet at Cloutsham in the autumn, is the beacon pile on the crest of Dunkery, whence a glorious view can be obtained, and in all probability several deer will pass within easy view. The commanding ridge of Grabhist Hill, near Dunster, again, always has its line of figures silhouetted against the sky to watch the panorama of Croydon Hill stretched beneath their feet, down the long slope of which, the Hunt is generally seen in full progress when the meet is at Slowley.

The Exe and the Barle are the two biggest rivers that are usually encountered in the course of a day's work with the Devon and Somerset, though of course the Taw is sometimes met with, though more rarely. Both Exe and Barle form awkward obstacles when in spate,



STAG GOING UP HORNER WATER.

and fords are likely to be encountered where the swirling water reaches high enough to touch the saddle flaps. Between Marsh Bridge and Withypool the Barle has many fords, but it is only at Three Waters and Torr Steps and Bradley Clammer that one can ride comfortably through the foaming torrent in a flood, and even these passages are not unfrequently quite unusable. Many a horse has been led and some have been ridden across the Early British bridge of stones at Torr Steps, but it is by no means a desirable method of crossing, there being a rocking stone in mid-flood, perhaps purposely constructed so by the prehistoric architect, which is very likely to throw a horse off his balance and send him struggling into the rushing stream. The late master of the Quarne Harriers, in leading his horse across on the occasion of a heavy flood, stumbled over one of his own hounds and fell horse, hound and man with an alarming splash from the causeway. The depth of water was no great matter, being little more than waist high, but the struggling horse came near to causing his master serious injury. Half a mile up the stream at Hindspit there is a much more difficult ford, where at the confluence of the Westwater stream a deep hole with awkward boulders once gave a master of the West Somerset foxhounds a right good ducking. Here in

this same deep pool one might have seen in years gone by, after an October spate, a salmon or two secured by a noose of copper wire passed above the tail and cleverly attached to a bending alder bough, to be retrieved after dark by some cunning poacher. At spawning time salmon run freely up both Exe and Barle for many a mile, if only there is water enough to float them, to the tiny streams that trickle down the moorland combes, and in the shallow pools beneath the rocks the great fish may be seen, sometimes quite landlocked, if the flood falls rapidly. The river Haddeo in its wildest floods seldom has volume enough to be unfordable, but will often rise quite unexpectedly, when perhaps there has been a heavy rainfall on the Brendon hills, while the Exe and Barle still remain placid and uncoloured.

Beaten deer seem to realise that a heavy water is their safest refuge, and in the wide stretches near Dulverton it is often a very difficult matter indeed to handle a stag that stands at bay far out from the dripping banks. These are the occasions on which hounds are apt to suffer from the exposure to the chilling stream, and from being caught at a disadvantage by the antlers of a fighting stag. In particularly dry seasons stags appear to know where the deep weir pools, few and far between, are to be found, and doubtless they bathe in

them at night, for when brought to their last devices they are very much inclined to seek for one of them, and there swim up and down until the deftly thrown line secures them. Haddon Hill is by no means the pleasantest of the many heath covered enclosures of Exmoor to ride over at speed, as the herbage is old and rank, and many a hidden channel, washed out by the thunder showers of summer, the heavy rains and melted snows of winter and the early spring, lies lurking amongst the grass and ling as a pitfall for the unwary. Many a fall has the crest of Haddon witnessed, and it is just such falls as these that take place here, in galloping on the flat, that are amongst the most dangerous of hunting accidents, and were it not that heather and peat provide most excellent soft falling, the casualty list of an autumn season must be longer than it usually is. It is not an unusual occurrence in a fall while galloping over such ground as this, to turn a complete somersault and drop watch or money from one's pocket, which seldom comes to hand again, and it is surprising the distance to which one's hunting crop will fly, as one whirls through the air in the act of falling from a horse that is going best pace over trappy ground. It is not in the descent of precipices or in negotiating the deepcombe side paths, awe inspiring as they are, that falls usually take place in Exmoor hunting,

but an innocent looking piece of heather with a hidden water channel or two will empty as many saddles as the stiffest fence in the shires. For strangers who wish to secure their first glimpse of a red deer in a state of freedom there is no likelier spot for the attainment of their wishes than the summit of Hadborough, or the neighbourhood of the harbourer's cottage that nestles among the tall Scotch firs at Frogwell Lodge. From his house the harbourer can look out upon many a distant point which he has to visit in the course of his arduous duties: the heights of Dunkery and Winsford Hill looming large against the distant sky, while to the south he looks down on country where deer live, but which he does not harbour inasmuch as it is lent to Sir John Heathcote Amory.

Across the Haddon valley a curious object in the landscape is the solitary tower of what was once Upton parish church, a tower which, like that of Withypool, on the banks of the Barle, seems to have been built to defy the wear and tear of time and weather.

Far down below, amongst green water meadows, three or four neat buildings and an ancient water wheel compose the hamlet known as Hartford Mill, where lives a veteran enthusiast in the science of harbouring, James Wensley by name, to whose training is due much of the credit of the present harbourer's success. From



JIM WENSLEY.

his cottage doorway Jim Wensley need never pass a day of all the year without seeing deer on the slopes of Hartford Cleave, that lie within a few hundred yards of his trim flower garden. A walk through Haddon Wood with him is instructive indeed ; whether it be upon the tell-tale snow carpet of mid-winter, the dry dust of July, or the moistened soil of September, endless signs and tokens convey a meaning to his experienced eye, that notes at every few yards through the woodland paths some hint of the presence of deer or fox, badger or pheasant, blackgame or woodcock, the baneful presence of some feathered vermin or some bloodthirsty stoat, while at each pool of the tumbling Haddeo he may point out some sign that marks the whereabouts of that arch-fisherman the otter.

Herons and brown buzzards, kingfishers and water ouzels, all come within his ken in turn, but one of the chief pleasures of this old shikari lies in the recounting of tales of bygone days. If these narratives could be preserved in all their native raciness, and in the rich West Country dialect in which they are told, while the speaker's eye and countenance convey unmistakably how all-absorbing is the naturalist's passion burning within, that were indeed a legacy to hand down to coming generations of sportsmen !

All the nature that surrounds Jim Wensley is to him an open book, and of him it is not

inaptly told that on being lent Fortescue's beautiful "Story of a Red Deer," he remarked that he "didn't think much of it as there was nothing in it that he hadn't known all his life!"

Eastward of Haddon, and separated from it by a mile of wild common land, lies a romantic and sheltered glen, running north and south and known as Bittescombe. Here deer find another safe harbour, under the protection of Sir John Ferguson Davie, whose snug woodlands beside the Lupley Water are always tenanted by them. Lying as it does in a line with the Chipstable and Huish Cleave coverts, which form the easternmost sanctuary, Bittescombe often has hounds running across it from east to west and vice versa, and its steep descent amongst fallen tree stems and gnarled and twisted roots often strikes terror to the heart of the unaccustomed or nervous pursuer.

Very different from the cramped enclosures of Chipstable and its vicinity is the fair open expanse of Molland Moor where the heather lies east and west for hundreds of acres in free untrammeled sweep, and where hounds can drive and fling unchecked from Anstey Barrows to Twitchen village. No wider landscape or one more beautiful is to be seen in all North Devon, than is commanded by this, the southernmost reach of Exmoor, from whence in a bird's-eye view, the eye sweeps nearly all Devon,

BURY FORD.



and takes in many a Dartmoor peak and tor, where bolder outlines and more uncompromising features stand out against the southern sky.

It is by way of Molland Moor and the adjoining Anstey Common, that deer travel from the well-known Hawkridge strongholds to their favourite summer retreats in the neighbourhood of North and South Molton and of Castle Hill. Here it was that Mr. Sanders beheld his first veritable stag (barring three spring deer taken on the Quantocks) break covert from Lord Clinton's woodland at Combe, and a right royal stag he was moreover, with a curve of thirty-five inches, a spread of twenty-nine inches, and a girth of seven inches, while the points numbered fourteen. Fourteen couple of old hounds with seven couple of puppies followed him after half an hour's law, and three hours after the lay on this notable stag stood at bay in the Haddeo at Steart Cottage and was shortly taken.

By the ford of the Haddeo where it spreads below the arches of the old packhorse bridge at Bury Village is a spot where many of the hunting paths of Haddon converge, and here is a favourite meeting place upon which the field often gathers from different coigns of vantage on the hilltops, and meets the pack as it comes bustling down from the kennel at the harbourer's cottage, in charge of huntsman or whipper-in,

preparatory to a lay on upon the foil of some warrantable stag that has been roused by the tufters, and has fled for safety towards the Exe Valley or the cramped enclosures of the Brushford and Combe districts. Packed with eager horsemen and horsewomen, the narrow village roadways, which can hardly by any stretch of imagination be dignified by the name of streets, become almost impassable for a while, until the magic password of "hounds, please," clears a gangway, and the panting pack, hot and dusty already, canters through, pressing closely on horses and horsemen. Then the cavalcade follows with all haste to the scene of the lay on, whether it be on the heights of Baronsdown or in the cool green meadows at Hele Bridge. A little way up stream from the village there lies a shady pool of the Haddeo, which seems to have a fatal attraction for hard pressed deer, and it is, by the way, a favourite otter's haunt as well. Even in the longest summer's drought it has depth enough for a score of yards or more for a stag to swim and keep his enemies at bay, but even in swimming his stroke becomes feebler and feebler still, until some old hound bolder than the rest dashes in and delays his progress, only to find himself flung off and soured in the muddy waves, to climb sadly ashore and bay defiance from a safer distance. Now the long lasso line comes into play and the whipper-in,

fastening a strong stick to its final loop, casts it deftly across the wide spread antlers, swings a turn round the corrugated beam, and then indeed the stag's time is short. Even then, however, some stags, especially towards October, will give their captors some awkward moments, and the author well remembers a lassoed stag turning short on the holders of the rope in a bend of the Exe under Curr Cleave, whereby they all fell hurriedly on the slippery sod, and for some anxious seconds were very much at his mercy. On another occasion in Horner the huntsman found himself obliged to mount a tree with all speed, a roped stag swinging round with such celerity that nothing but tree climbing was possible for the chance of an escape.



CHAPTER IV.

DUNKERY—HOW THE MOOR RIDES—THE GRAVEYARD—
FOG, FROST, AND SNOW—THE MOORLAND STREAMS—
HORNER WOODS IN WINTER—LUCCOMBE ALLERS—THE
CUTCOMBE COVERTS—SWEETERY AND BAGLEY.



ONE of the great features of stag-hunting, in size at any rate, is the great hill of Dunkery and those who follow the

staghounds will find themselves on its rugged heights more often than on any other hill in the whole of the West Country. Its weather beaten beacon, seventeen hundred feet above the sea, is a magnificent scanning place on a fine August day, but woe betide the luckless

BOGGY PLACE ON DUNKERY.

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wretch who has to stand there long, in a winter hailstorm or even upon a chill October afternoon. Bleak and inhospitable and very rough to the tread are many of the wide slopes that run down in comparatively gentle gradients to the heads of the deep water-worn combes with which the hillsides are seamed.

On the northern slopes facing Cloutsham a carpet of green whortleberry and a less stony soil afford fairly good galloping ground, but to gallop across this wide expanse with any degree of comfort or safety, any rider must know his way right well, or else follow a pilot to whom it is all familiar.

Wootton Common and the Graveyard and the hillside facing Dunkery Hill Gate are covered with myriads of loose surface stones, which are in great request for road mending and building purposes, and the result is, that where one's horse does not trip upon a fixed or rolling stone, he sometimes puts his foot into a hole whence a boulder has been extracted. Some of the more stony parts remind the rider very much of the going on Dartmoor, but of that country and its stones and bogs it has been wittily said, "On Dartmoor you can ride nowhere except where you can, while on Exmoor you can ride everywhere except where you can't."

Dunkery has its boggy tracts, and some well-defined spring heads which must be avoided at

all times of the year excepting at the end of a continued drought, when they are mostly "as safe as Piccadilly," to quote a Rhodesian term, but there are at least two gutters which always seem to prove treacherous to a hurrying August field, and one of these in particular in the neighbourhood of Webber's Post not unfrequently has half a dozen victims at once, lying well hidden as it does beneath a luxuriant growth of heath and rushes, while the water trickles knee-deep below the surface of the ground. Another such channel runs down to Sweetery from the heights of Great Row Barrow, which every now and then has its tale of empty saddles. Between Row Barrow and Luccott there is soft ground galore, and beside the Exford road there runs a drainage gutter which, though generally dry, has been washed out by winter storms to an unpleasing depth. One of the bogs which does not make much show until one is fairly in it, lies at the head of Annicombe, but it has black peaty depths into which a small horse can more or less disappear, and the same may be said of another set of springs, above the trees in Hollowcombe, but these fortunately do not often come directly in the line of the chase.

To ride a tired horse at all fast across the stonier portions of the Graveyard is a trial of nerve and horsemanship, but, strange to say, there are comparatively few mishaps seen on

this rugged side of Dunkery, where horses might naturally be expected to make many a false step.

Here it was that the Hunt was overtaken by a most violent thunderstorm in August, 1898, a cloud of inky blackness hanging low over the scene, and just as the hounds were let go the first blinding flash sped straight to earth, apparently close in front of the racing pack. Then the storm broke loose ; flash and crash succeeded one another with instant swiftness, horses bolted and horses bucked, and a great silence fell on the usually voluble field, the only spoken words being, "Hi ! catch my horse!" or "Oh, stop him!" and all the time the quivering lines of lightning—white, red and violet—stabbed straight down into the dry hillside, and the echo of the thunder crash rolled down to the combes below and came back with dull reverberation to meet the next tumult. At last there came rain, but not till the centre of the cloud had passed on to the westward and its worst fury was expended.

How it was that a rushing mass of some two hundred horsemen, galloping straight beneath the cloud, with steel and brass in plenty, was not struck by the levin bolt, seems wonderful when instances of stricken cattle on the hills are so common. But somehow there was no casualty, except amongst the runaway and restive horses, one of which threw its rider in Anni-combe, and gave him a very punishing fall.

It is hard to realise, in riding across the moor after rain, that close beneath the peaty surface lies the gravelly subsoil of which the hills are composed for a depth of many feet until the bed rock is reached.

The peaty envelope varies greatly in thickness, and it is where it is deepest, and consequently most retentive of water, that horses find the going most difficult. Now, if Nature had only been let alone, and interfering man with his schemes and projects, had not cut and delved and drained, one might still gallop with free bridle-rein over many a mile of wilderness that now requires much care and navigation. On the topmost heights the peaty plains naturally hold the rain-water longest, while on the steep scarps and slopes it drains away and trickles down to join the bubbling streams, so that it is just where one would fain be galloping, and all looks sound and prosperous to an inexperienced eye, that a gutter, or a deep hole, or a rotten honey-combed expanse bids the hasty rider pause if he would not bring himself and his horse to grief.

The Chains enclosure has a great reputation for uncomfortable going, and it certainly is one of the least desirable parts of the moor to traverse at speed, each successive blind gutter being apt to take its toll of the field, and there is a certain gateway in a wire fence that spans the

middle of the plain which is very apt to become totally impassable. Along by the southern boundary there runs a path which is always fairly sound, and even when fetlock deep in standing water is far preferable to the soggy grass beside it. Running east and west, this path leads to the retaining embankments of Pinkery Pond, and here a considerable length of the peaty sides of the path fell in some few seasons ago and caused a veritable quagmire.

Mr. J. W. Budd, of Combe Park, near Lynmouth, had this miniature landslip removed, and in the midst of the débris there was found the complete carcase of a moorland sheep, which was preserved in all its original freshness by the anti-septic action of the peat. The long rank carpet of green moor grass, with which all the wet ground is thickly covered by the end of any summer of average warmth, renders the surface very blind riding, and there is no doubt that Exmoor rides actually better after a drying east wind in the spring and early summer than at any other time in the year.

In August and the first half of September, however, if the season has been normally dry, one can ride almost anywhere, except, of course, on those occasional green spots at the heads of the various combes where deep-seated springs keep the ground permanently soft, and where a mossy growth for ever overlies the peaty

quagmire beneath. Down in the combes beside the streams there are undesirable tracts, but the moor sheep and the ponies, by their frequent crossings, give ample indication where the sound ground lies, and, indeed, one can find no better guide when in doubt than a well-worn sheep track, that always leads to safety, winding its way from pool to pool until it comes out on some firm and welcome stretch of heather. The undermining of their banks by the tumbling streams is sometimes a source of peril, and a certain crossing of the Farley Water near its source in Blackpits once earned for itself a sinister reputation by engulfing in a sudden downfall of many tons of soft earth a somewhat ill-tempered hunter mare, known as "Mrs. Maybrick," that was carrying at the time the then Master of the Exmoor Foxhounds. All the Exmoor bogs have certain ancient ways across and about them which are well known to the moormen who live in their neighbourhood, and are handed down by tradition to generations of staghunters, but to know them for one's self, to be able to show the way to a well-mounted field in a hurry over such lonely expanses as Longstone Bog or Blackpits or Duckypool, is an accomplishment possessed by few.

When all is still and balmy, and the humming of a thousand insects in the warm noonday sunshine lulls one to a dreamy contentment, Exmoor

and its plains of purple and sage and emerald are fair indeed to look upon ; but all this is only for a month or two, and then come the many days of winter, when the outlook is far otherwise. Then in a moment a great drifting immensity of sea-fog arises upon the scene, and in a few minutes blots out everything familiar, and reduces all the landscape to a circle of a few square yards, surrounded by an impenetrable wall of fleecy vapour, through which neither man nor horse may find his way except by following a beaten path or by sticking closely to the outline of some moorland wall or fence, or haply by descending to the nearest stream and following its winding course.

To attempt to ride straight across the open is a most hazardous proceeding, inasmuch as one cannot possibly maintain a straight line of progress without visible landmarks ; and sound, moreover, in a fog is as deceiving as sight. For hours and hours the fog will hang, and perhaps for days and even weeks it will keep the hilltops silent and untenanted, and then a burst of sunlight or a sweeping breath of the wild west wind, or perchance a rain shower, will disperse the whole fabric as if by magic, and the moor will stand revealed, dark and damp and gloomy, but still rideable. Under clearer skies comes usually the arch enemy of all hunting—the frost—and very severe indeed is its grip

sometimes on these shelterless plains a thousand feet and more above sea level. In great and protracted frosts the streams are wont to freeze and then overflow their frozen surfaces, freezing again and again in tier upon tier of fairy-like ice filagree that delights the eye with its endless fantastic combinations of crystal and sheet ice and stalactite. The wet ground is very perilous riding then, and one's favourite hunter is better off at home in his loose box than scrambling over the precarious footholds of these wild forest by-ways. Then there is yet another terror with which Nature vetoes the chase. Ever and again, as the winter months come round, she spreads her white mantle all round her shoulders, drifting the roads and paths bank high, and sending great swirling sheets of whiteness all across the open, with heavy wind-swept banks beside the hedges and through the gaps and gateways where the whistling north wind brings its flaky load. Bright and hot is the sunshine next day on the fallen masses, and then by night the stars glitter with brightness in the still blue heaven, and the frost grips all the world and turns it to cast iron. When Exmoor is in its wildest moods it is seen by but few, and those who for the most part by long acquaintance turn a dull eye upon its wonderful colourings and its fantastic skies and quaint lights and shades.

Some of its most impressive aspects, however, are undoubtedly those when the storm-fiend is abroad and the elements are at play. The blank cartridge of a westerly gale, against which the galloping deer cannot force their way over the open, is all very well, but when double-shotted with hail it is enough to make the boldest horseman turn and fly for the shelter of the nearest beech fence, where he may cower until the squall sweeps by.

The moorland streams are always interesting, whether it be fishing time or whether they are rushing down bank high in thick turbid flood to join the Lyn or Barle or Exe or Horner water. Along their course hunted deer love to run, with splashes and occasional full-stops to roll their broad backs in the pools if they have sufficient start of their pursuers to allow themselves time to do it, but every stickle and every angle of the stream has its complement of boulders and of water-worn rocks on which the tell-tale splashes left by the hurrying animal prove a sure guide to the keen-eyed huntsman, and every here and there, at intervals of a mile or two, perhaps, are cattle poles stretched across the stream-beds, where deer are sure to leave the water or, at any rate, show some trace of their passing, either to the hound's keen instinct or the huntsman's enquiring eye.

In the hot August days the frequent crossing of the streams gives panting dry-mouthinged horses the opportunity for a hasty drink, which to them must be nectar indeed, but it sometimes happens that, not content with a mouthful, horses elect to lie down and roll, regardless of their rider's objections. To ride the best part of twenty miles to a meet, and then to find oneself unceremoniously deposited in the stony bed of a stream is, to say the least of it, distinctly unsatisfactory, and a horse, moreover, that has once appreciated the pleasures of a roll in a limpid stream is apt to repeat the operation, even in the middle of a run.

The hunting power of certain hounds in the pack is brought into play by the habit the deer have of running the course of the streams, and many old hounds will cast themselves at a gallop along the bank, questing each likely stone, snuffing at an overhanging bough or bunch of fern, and eventually hitting off the deer's point of departure with a loud and eager note which quickly brings the pack to join in the re-established chase.

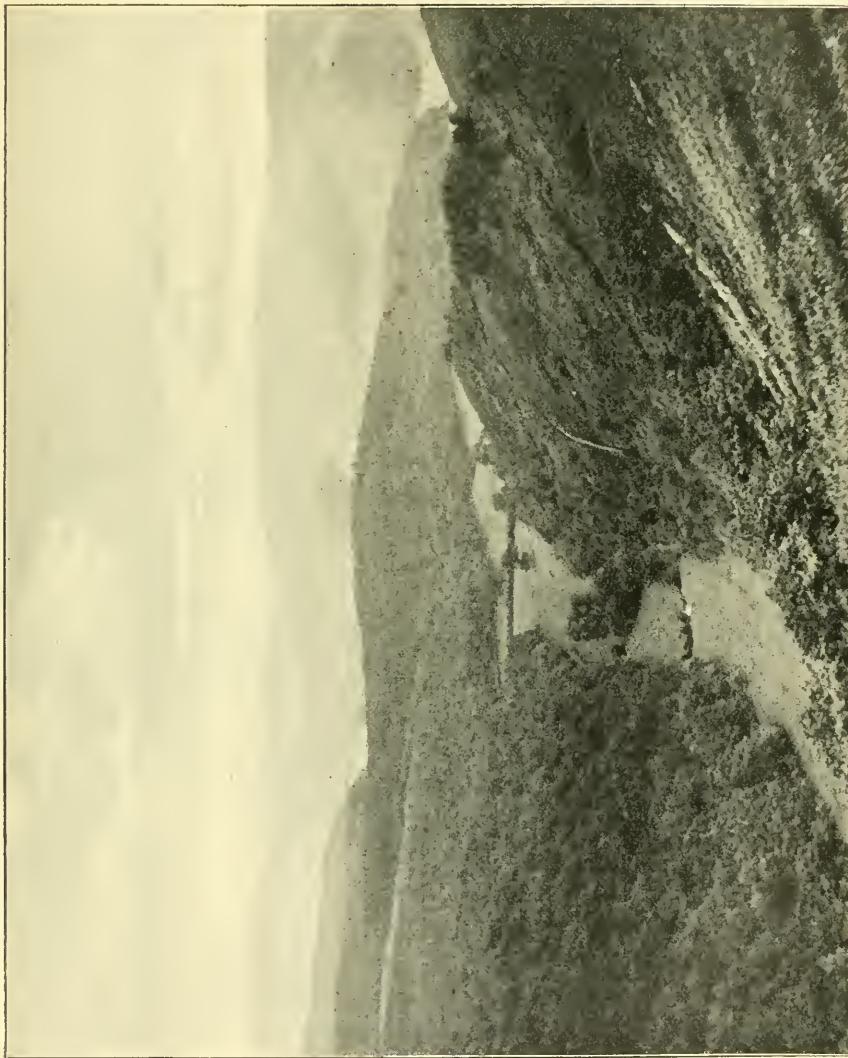
Other hounds again, running jealous or hunting for themselves alone, will strike the spot where the deer landed dripping from his bath, and will race away mute as mice upon the foil, gaining a long start of their comrades until the huntsman happens to catch a view of their manœuvre.

Once leafy June has covered all the woodlands alike with her dense green mantle, there is a certain sameness in the depths of all the big woods of Exmoor, and the endless deep shade is, perhaps, less alluring to an artistic eye than the varied scheme of colour of other seasons. In mid-winter, of course, neutral tints are the order of the day, and it is only in exceptionally dry weather that the harmony of grey and brown and slate blue and purple is revealed in the deep woodlands such as Horner. On the other hand one can see much further through the tree stems, and every moving object is noted at once, where it might pass invisible amongst the fern and dense green foliage of August and September. In hind hunting time the great woods are not so full of deer as in the summer and autumn, for the big herds betake themselves to the open combes and hill-tops, where they can look all round and descry their enemies from afar, but when once a hind finds herself hard pressed, and fairly separated from her comrades, she is sure to try a spell of running amongst the woodlands, with occasional trips down to the water to take soil and perhaps run the stream-bed for a while to gain time. Some equinoctial gale, perhaps, has thrown a tree-top downwards into the tumbling torrent, and under the shelter of its branches hinds will often find a hiding place,

sinking themselves to the chin in the ice-cold stream while the hounds quest doubtfully up or down each bank. At such a spot the huntsman will naturally cast an enquiring eye, but sometimes the shelter is good enough to completely hide the hunted animal, and it is only by accident that she is seen to leave her lair long after the chase has moved away, and she is safe till the next hunting day.

In the Horner Woods there are always sheep to be seen picking a precarious livelihood from the steep hillsides, leaving their wool on briar and black thorn and occasionally in the treacherous days of spring giving up altogether the difficult struggle for life. The Quantock Hills seem to be the place where sheep have most difficulty in picking up a livelihood, and here, too, even the ponies occasionally succumb at the end of a hard winter.

The scene at the finish of a good hind hunting run, if it terminates early enough in the day for the mid-winter afternoon sun to illumine the scene, is far more suitable for the painter's brush than the end of a day in the fashionable season. Not that the hind figures much in the scene, for she has no antlers with which to fight, and her end is swift and sudden, but the grouping of hounds and horses, and the mere handful of human beings dragging the hind from the water and assisting in the final



HORNER WOODS—VIEW TOWARDS DUNKERY.

ceremony, stand out in bolder contrast to the dull tones of rocks and mossy sward and bare stones and quivering branches than does the crowd of a hundred horsemen under shady boughs all densely draped in heavy green.

Facing Holnicote there are some quiet combes where the earliest flights of woodcock journeying under the steely October moon are wont to drop some members of their band, and here in sultry August one or more big stags are usually to be found. The conformation of this side of Dunkery lends itself to a ready view of the stag when roused, as he must move upwards and shew himself to the waiting field on the stony slopes above, the fertile vale beneath being fenced off for some considerable distance.

The deep gorge of Cutcombe is lined with dense woods, which overhang its sheltered depths that are threaded by the tiny stream that eventually runs through Dunster Lawns to the sea. Stealing down from the hill through the Cutcombe coverts the deer have a highway to Croydon Hill and the Slowley and Dunster strongholds, and by turning up a side combe they can pass almost unseen to the wild and precipitous recesses of Hartcleave and its snug plantations. From thence they can make their way unhindered to Lype Common and the warm lying of Chargot Wood, and from thence

they occasionally travel over the line of the disused mineral railway on the Brendon Hills to Withiel pond and the Haddon coverts.

Far from keeping their herds distinct, there is no doubt that the deer frequently move to and fro between the districts into which the home country is nominally divided, the old hinds teaching their calves the paths and byways by which they have been in the habit of travelling themselves on many a shiny night. Every now and then in the month of April a pair of shed horns will be picked up in some covert or on some feeding ground, where the stag has gone as a complete stranger, and again in wild October some stag will be found in company with a herd of hinds, having travelled many weary miles from his usual habitat. On the whole, perhaps, the hinds stick more closely to their own locality than the stags. The most likely side of Cloutsham for good sport is the Sweetery front, where the trees and fern brakes run up into the hillside combes and end in thick plantations of larch and other firs. Here, if a stag has any confidence in his own fleetness and endurance, there is nothing to prevent him betaking himself at once to the open when the tufters rouse him, and if he once goes fairly away from the head of Bagley Combe there is bound to be a run of no mean order. From the first field above the farm one can



WAITING FOR THE PACK ON STOKE RIDGE.

view on foot the first stages of the huntsman's work without wearying the back of the good animal that is presently to carry one in a stretching gallop to Badgworthy and beyond. The green and purple hillside of Dunkery shews plainly, if the light be favourable, the red flank of the galloping stag as he strides away toward Langcombe Head, while the scarlet-coated whipper-in bustles along to intercept the tufters that are following in his wake, and then stops and turns his horse's head towards the master, who all this time has been attentively following proceedings from a point high up on the Cloutsham side. Then if all be well and the stag is warrantable the master will gallop down to Cloutsham, the kennel doors will be thrown wide open, and the field will come hurrying up in close attendance on the eager pack, to thread the dusty track from Cloutsham upwards towards the moor until Stoke Ridge is reached and the starting point of another moorland run is gained.

CHAPTER V.

MR. BASSET'S AND COLONEL HORNBY'S GREAT RUNS—A
MEMORABLE BY-DAY ON THE FOREST—FROM HADDON TO
WHEAL ELIZA.



EACH year has its "run of the season," and except in times of protracted drought at least half-a-dozen

memorable chases can be counted upon during the all too short ten weeks of stag-hunting, and the following records of some modern runs, written at the time, will prove interesting alike to those who took part in them and to those who for some reason or another missed being out on those particular days, or, even being out, got left behind.

On Wednesday, in the last week but one of the season of 1889, there took place a most



ALL READY TO BEGIN.

remarkable run from Leeworthy, or rather from Bratton Fleming. The Master, Lord and Lady Ebrington, Mrs. Froude Bellew, Miss C. Clarke, Miss Halliday, Miss Lock-Roe, Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Bouverie, Miss St. John Mildmay, Capt. and Miss Kinglake, Messrs. Yearsley, Watson Snow, Hamilton, Hext, Richards, Seldon, T. Horn, Dennis, Ferguson, Roberts, Bertram Pott, Roope, Morgan, Capt. Karslake, Hon. A. Fortescue, Hon. L. J. Bathurst, Mr. Ian Amory, Lord Valletort, and Mr. A. Locke were out. The pack was again kennelled at Nightacot as upon the occasion of our last visit to this country, and once more Mr. Bowden fed the hungry and thirsty. Tufters were taken to Smithapark Wood and thrown into the same spot which yielded such a bountiful supply of hinds last time, opposite Button Hill, and almost immediately found a stag, which, after a turn or two in covert took the now familiar line up the valley towards Tithecombe, passing by Button Bridge. Anthony stopped the tufters here, and Arthur galloped off for the pack, which, after a little delay in the Twitchen valley, were laid on by the Friendship Inn at five minutes to one. Away they raced over much the same line as before, by Chapman's Barrows, and on the left of Sadler's Stone, leaving the Chains wall to the right, and so over Furzehill to Hoar Oak Water; up over Cheriton Ridge and down

again the other side to the Farley Water, where a slight check occurred, and not before it was wanted. Up to this the pace had been tremendous for forty-five minutes from the time of laying on, and only about twenty-five of the field were well up. Arthur cast up the water, and succeeded in hitting the line just before coming to the Forest wall, whence hounds bent to the left as they rose the steep side and came to the Brendon road, crossing it just at Brendon Two Gates and soon made good speed over Brendon Common, till they sank by the Doone Valley into Badgworthy Water.

For a little distance the line lay up under the fence of Mr. Snow's Deer Park, and then crossed it to Manor Allotment, whence hounds made for the Chalk Water, by Stowford Bottom. Still driving ahead, they soon reached Porlock and Lucott commons, and sank to the Chettisford Water under Nutscale, from which they rose again at once to cross Wilmersham common and go down through Hole Wood to the Horner valley, where, just under Cloutsham, hounds got up to their deer. Down the valley they drove him to Horner Mill, and then with a sharp turn to the right, went up over Parsonage Side and into Chapel Plantation. Carrying forward through the pines, they ran right into Lucombe village, and the final scene was enacted on the lawn of the Rectory, at a few minutes after

three o'clock. Time, two hours and ten minutes, and the distance over twenty miles. He was a good-bodied, seven-year-old deer, with a head rather on the decline. He carried three upon top on one side, with brow and tray, and on the other, a straight horn on top with two tiny offers, and his rights complete below.

The middle of September is a time at which one may expect good runs to commence. Rain has generally fallen by that time, harvest operations and a month's hunting have set the deer in motion after their summer's rest, and they are in the best of condition.

On Tuesday, the fifteenth of September, 1891, the hounds having returned on the previous Saturday to Exford from their annual week's stag-hunting on the Quantocks, the meet that morning was at a little wayside public-house on the Filleigh and Martinhoe Road known as the Friendship Inn. Within a mile on the Barnstaple side—and that town is not many miles away—lie the coverts of Bratton Fleming, Tithecome, Twitchen Wood, and so forth, which have several times of late years produced deer that have shown splendid gallops over the forest, but these were not to be called upon to-day. Miles had been harbouring as usual, but his report was unfavourable, nothing warrantable was at home, only a hind and some male deer; the stag that was supposed to be

in the neighbourhood was not forthcoming. So Mr. Basset gave marching orders for Brayford, and thither went most of the company in a long procession up the Filleigh Road. First the hounds and huntsman, then a hundred horsemen or so, then a number of carriages, then more horsemen, and so on. Some late arrivals by train from Dulverton met the vanguard just before the turn down into Brayford, and nicked in most opportunely. Passing on through the village of Brayford, till the bridge over Hole Water was reached, the master had the coverts between the Simonsbath Road and Sherracombe drawn with the pack. Just before half-past twelve a four-year-old stag jumped up and went away up the bottom of Sherracombe towards Whitefield Down, the whipper-in managing to stop the tufters by the ford. Huxtable's horse was taken down Sherracombe Lane to meet him, and he quickly relinquished his tufting pony with the little red danger signal on its tail. With the exception of half-a-dozen horsemen, who were waiting in position on the top of Whitefield Down, the bulk of the field were in the neighbourhood of the Poltimore Arms when the news that something had gone away first spread.

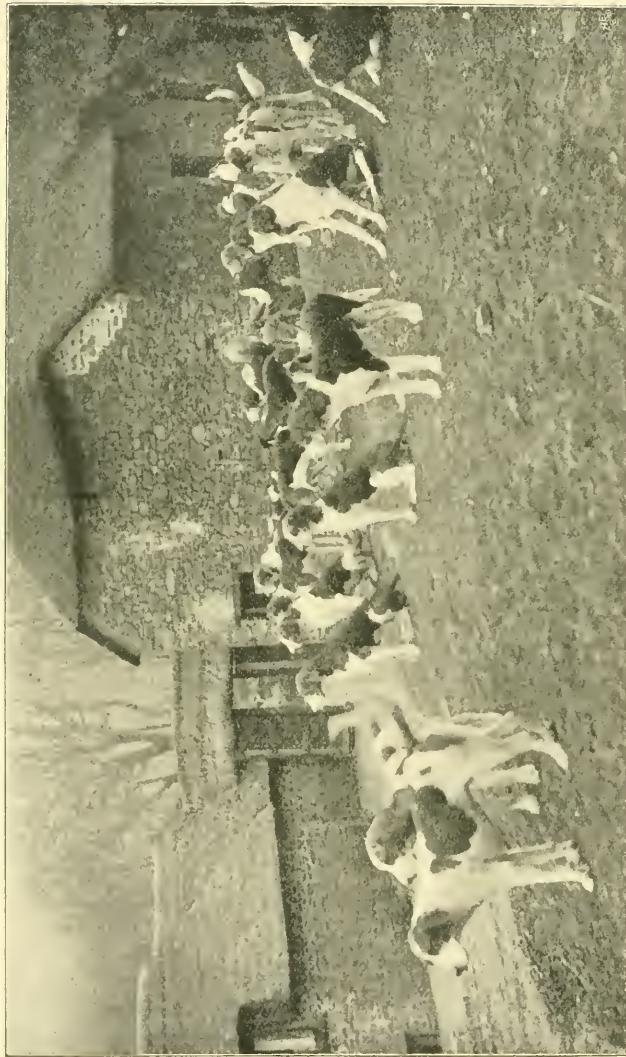
A few minutes' gallop brought all to the grassy lane above Five Barrows Cross, where the master was sounding a note in reply to Tucker's whistle.

BADGWORTHY WOOD.



Then the eager hounds race upwards, their whimpering cry floats by upon the cool west wind, the hard high road is left finally behind, the sheep hurry off stampeding, and the second forest run of the season has begun, and no mistake. Close packed together, racing for dear life, heads up and sterns down, no music now, away they go over Squallacombe and down the long slope of Vintcombe to cross the tiny stream of the Barle and the Challacombe Road at Driver Cott. Then right up over the long ascent beyond, horses blowing and lathering, some left far behind already, one saddle empty, with the Chains on the left front and Exe Plain on the right—a choice of evils. Now they are bending slightly to the right, a welcome sign, for it means Farley Water and Brendon Common presently to those who can live so far. But there is a lady's horse down, struggling with vain efforts in the peaty mire. And there's another! How that man on the right in the white garments shot off, to be sure! Here's the Lynton Road, thank goodness, and the face and voice of John Tarr, with second horses. On again now with four fresh springs and a new pair of bellows, leaving Brendon Two Gates far behind. Down the long descending slope of Brendon Common, gaining on hounds at every stride, through a miry gateway, and still downwards at full gallop over Hoccombe Hill

to the upper ford of the Badgworthy Water. Up over Manor Allotment with hounds bearing away on the right as if for Larkbarrow ; but they leave it on one side and the chase sweeps on. Down and up at Stowford Crossing, fording the headings of the Chalk Water, and straight on over the short young heather of Outer Alscott—a part of Mill Hill—to the Weir Water and Porlock Allotment. Then there is a gradual rise to the Exford Road that tells terribly on all the horses that are carrying weight. In the road Lord Ebrington finds a fresh horse whereabouts to face Lucott Moor, from the top of which the Horner coverts heave in sight. Some dash on through Lucott Farm, others by Wilmersham and Cloutsham. The stag holds on almost to Horner mill, then turns off right-handed for Chapel plantation. Most of the hounds have straggled in coming down through the woods, but a few work on. Huxtable is at hand, and sees the stag come doubling back under Horner mill with one hound at his haunches. He toils up the stream to East Water Foot and there stands at bay with the single hound at 2.30, just two hours from when he was found, the distance in a straight line from point to point being sixteen miles, and the total probably over twenty. The horn soon brought up more hounds and he broke away down stream to the mill, where he was taken on



THE PACK AT CLOUTSHAM.

the water wheel, after badly pricking two hounds, which fell right to the bottom. It took half-an-hour to get him down. He had only six points.

On the following Monday, for the third time in the season, the Cloutsham coverts provided a stag which has gone to the open, on each occasion by much the same route. A comparatively small field were enjoying the unwonted sunshine in the meeting field on Cloutsham Ball, when suddenly the master appeared at 12.40 galloping back from the direction of Prickslade, and sounding a cheery note of warning as he came. One and all, of those who meant riding, made ready at once for a start, while the kennel doors were flung wide open, and the pack issued eager for the fray. Piloting them himself, the master made off at a good pace through the fields to Stoke Pero, and thence to the Pool fields, where Anthony was encountered. Then, after a change of horses, there was a move on to the fields upon Tarball, and hounds were laid upon the line of a stag which had gone away in the right direction with a good amount of law in his favour. This was at 1.5. They readily acknowledged the line and topped the two or three fences which separated them from Tarball Hill, in quick succession, then went out over the short heather of Wilmersham Plain and down to the Nutscale Water, at a rare pace, and checked opposite the foot of

Blackford Combe. They were at once cast up the water at a quick trot, the bulk of the field winding up the valley under Nutscale in single file, by the sheep path which lies amongst the boulders and the fern. A tiny rough fox-terrier kept with the pack for some distance, making the great twenty-five inch hounds look all the bigger by the contrast of its own diminutive inches. At last, having cast all up the Nutscale Water to Chettisford Bridge in vain, Anthony took the hounds all back again on the Exford side of the water to the little water in Ember Combe, and then completed the circuit by re-crossing the Chettisford Water and rejoining the master on Great Hill. The stag meanwhile had crossed the water direct at the point where hounds first checked, and ascending by Blackford Combe and Babe Hill, had attained the crest of Lucott Moor and borne right away for the forest. Being told of this, Anthony made a long cast, and struck the line at the boundary fence of Porlock Allotment, where the stag had crossed the Exford Road. Two casualties had already taken place, a lady falling on the way up the Chettisford Water, and a groom's horse pitching head first into the high road in the act of descending from the common at a place where the bank was unsound.

The hounds quickly traversed the easy descending slope of Porlock Allotment to the

Weir Water, and presently ascended Mill Hill with a right-handed slant ; then swung round left-handed after a short check and pointed for Larkbarrow by way of Kittucks. The field, nothing loth to take advantage of all this oscillation, sank and rose the deep chasm of the Chalk Water at Stowford Bottom, and were soon splashing across the first of the treacherous ground in Stowey Allotment. Across their path came the hounds, bearing away right-handed now to Landcombe on the north side of the Deer-park ; down the length of this to the Badgworthy Water, and then upstream for some distance. The master and the secretary, with fresh horses, galloped down to the Doone-path and forded the stream, while the chase swept on, up Hoccombe, and away to Brendon Two Gates. Time to this point, an hour and five minutes. Then out over again still westward, to the head of the Farley Water, hounds overrunning the line somewhat while the stag crouched in a peat-cutting. Jumping up, he was viewed, and hounds were soon racing away as if tied to him across the Chains to Pink-worthy Pond, where he soiled. The dauntless few still plodding on hugged the wall for the most part, the sharp pace and holding ground telling terribly on horses ; one every here and there coming to grief. One gentleman in falling received some nasty cuts and bruises about the

face and body, but was able to return to Simonsbath. Just as all were thinking that a finish at Bratton Fleming was imminent, hounds bent away right-handed again with a large circuit, and bore down on the fields near Paracombe. Right through the village went the stag, attracting buyers and sellers alike from an auction which was being held, and so on with sinking steps by Trentishoe to Heddon's Mouth, where he was killed at 3.30. A fine five-year-old stag, with brows and trays and two atop one side and two and an offer on the other. The stag made so many zigzag turns that it is difficult to estimate the distance covered, but it cannot have been less than twenty-three miles.

In some seasons it happens that the performance of an August stag, barely clear of his velvet, excels any run that follows it, but this is not generally the case. When, however, a great run does take place in August, it finds both men and horses less set in condition, and consequently makes more impression than a brilliant gallop later on in cooler weather.

By far the best run of the season of 1892 took place from Mr. Bouverie's Cutcombe coverts on Friday, August 26th, where two deer were roused after a short period of tufting. One of these was plainly seen to be a fine stag of five or six seasons, and though both went when disturbed towards Annicombe, yet their

lines were sufficiently divergent to enable Mr. Locke, acting as master in the absence of Mr. Basset, to lay on the pack at 12.25 in the North Hawkwell fields after duly stopping the tufters. Hot and dusty was the advance down the Dunster Road from Wheddon Cross, where hounds had been kennelled, and across the deep combe in which the Aville water trickles from pool to pool, and hotter still the climb up the stony lane above North Hawkwell to see hounds laid on. At a rack in the first fence above North Hawkwell Wood, they own it with a whimper and begin to scramble through the brush. Capt. Warre espies an obscure gate in an adjacent corner, and the field soon slip through, though a resounding thump and a smothered execration or two in the crowd tell that one horse at least is making free with his heels. Over the sun-baked fields towards Hill Barn hounds run but slowly, being once or twice at fault, and at Spangate a check of some minutes occurs. In Annicombe is a soiling pit much frequented by the deer, and in this the stag had been seen to lie for a while, ere he made off towards Luccombe. From this point hounds take it up with more eagerness, and soon traverse the stony side of Dunkery, over Brockwell and Huntscott and sink into Luccombe Allers, and Anthony's difficulties begin. First of all, a great ruddy hind starts out of

the snug shelter afforded by this deep little wooded gulch, and strides away towards Webber's Post, with long ears pricked forward in wonder and alarm. Then a big male deer breaks back lower down, and the bulk of the pack settle upon his foil and run merrily for half a mile towards Annicombe till Sidney stops them and Anthony takes them back once more to try and solve the question in the Allers. Again there is a cry and a rush, and a light-coloured three-year-old male deer breaks out, pointing for Horner, but blanches at sight of the field and gallops over the side of Robin How and also returns to Annicombe. Towards two o'clock Anthony crosses the head of the little Wytchanger Combe and throws his hounds into the thick part of Middlehill Plantation, and a challenge amongst the dark green pines at once sets every one on the "*qui vive.*" Stealing out from the trees comes the hunted stag, crosses a little space in the heather, and squats in a furze bush, plainly seen by every one. Several couple of hounds come toiling up on the line, but are stopped ere they disturb him, for others have got away meanwhile on the line of a hind, and the whole pack must be got together for the chase which is about to commence afresh.

At a quarter past two Anthony moves up to the furze bush, coming down wind, but the stag lies close till the hounds are all round him,

then jumps up and races away, soon distancing his enemies in spite of Anthony's efforts to head him away towards the open hill. Into Lucombe Plantations first of all, as if to try and shift hounds on to the line of the hind, which is to be seen trotting away in the vale towards West Lucombe over a corn field, then when that fails he doubles short round on Horner Hill, and slips away to Parsonage Side and sinks to the East Water. Now, reader, make up your mind at once, perch yourself in the spirit on the cantle of my saddle, and ride with me for an hour after that will-o'-the-wisp, the leading hound. Leave a hundred or so of doubting, debating staghunters perched at Webber's Post, and plunge down the zigzag path to the East Water Foot, splash through the Horner Water and strike up Lord Ebrington's Path, for this stag is flying up the main valley, the whole pack at his heels and Anthony's horn is getting fainter and fainter towards Pool Bridge. Take a pull now and let him trot all the way up the winding ascent, for there's many a mile yet of galloping to do, and we must husband our resources. Out of the coppice at last, up through the sheep paths on Ley Hill: how that little band of a dozen on the other side of the valley are galloping for Stoke, to be sure. Here are some foot people; we'll ask them. "Yes, all up the bottom," and sure

enough, there goes the horn at the Tarball end of Whitburrow Wood. There goes a red coat by Stoke Mill, so off we must go, too, for all we are worth, up the track through the fields to Lucott, then into the fields again at the second gate above the farm and all down the long sloping track to Blackford. There is the acting-master just ahead, on his gallant grey, and there are the hounds flying up the meadows by the water just below. Yonder though are more, further ahead, going with sterns down, mute as swallows, and as fast. Now through the tiny Blackford courtyard, out round the steeply sloping fields beyond, from gate to gate ; that's Anthony opposite galloping along the sheep-track, and about a score with him. Here's the boundary fence against Babe Hill, with never a gate and the ground as steep as the side of a house ; now where is the weak place ? Up there on the right by that furze bush. Out over we go, with a plunge and a struggle, and now to crawl gingerly round the shoulder of the hill, for a slip and a roll here mean broken bones and a good horse done for. Thank goodness ! that's left behind ! Now where on earth have hounds got to ? Oh, there they are, on the right, nearly on top of Lucott Moor and going as if possessed. Now let us trot up this long ascent as well as we can, avoiding the spring-heads, and once atop we'll see who can gallop

and who can stay behind. Up at last by the turf heaps, now we can see them again, sailing away on a breast high scent over Porlock Common towards Hawkcombe Head. Now let us dodge through the wet ground, pop through the sheep gap in the boundary wall, and sit down to gallop over this mile or more of short sound heather. That's better now, the good little horse beneath us is catching hold of his bit again, and soon will bring us up to those specks ahead. Already they look bigger as we fly past Hawkcombe Head and come down to a canter just through the gateway of Lord Lovelace's plantations. Now we'll extend him again and thunder up the middle track way, for that tail hound is evidently running the line, and those foot-people are all looking towards Silcombe. There's Sidney on the right, keeping an eye on the laggards lest they stir up other deer or drop behind altogether. Now we must leave this middle track, which has served us so well, and strike off to the right through the stubby pines and heather holding hard on the snaffle, and guiding all we know between the dead and dying treelets, or our headlong career may come to a sudden close. A few minutes' check in the top of Holmer Combe, just time to draw breath, and away goes Anthony again, blowing like Boreas, past the top of Twitchen Combe, with the hounds on his left, and stays

a moment to cheer them on in the extreme corner of the plantations. So we must stay too, and now we must rattle down the stony lane to Broomstreet, rattle through the courtyard, just able to catch a glimpse of three hounds skimming across a ley field. A sporting farmer, mounted on a sturdy roan, catches a view of the leading ones as they race along the lower edge of Yenworthy Common, so up we must go, over one small but steep field, and once again we are on the heather. Now, reader, one more effort if we can ; those fleeting forms fly faster than ever ; they are closing with their deer, and this open common is our chance to get up in time. Steady him till you gain the summit, then give him his head and a gentle admonition with the spur, and fly down the long slope to County Gate, take the right hand track and trot down the bridle path in Seven Thorns and look over into that round reservoir in the combe two hundred feet below you. There he is, the gallant beast that has led us such a merry dance, and already hounds are there too, and chasing him round and round with a clamour like a peal of bells. Now, Sidney ! quick with the rope ! That has him. Well thrown ! Now let us help to take him, that his sufferings may be short. What a noble head he has ! All his rights, bar the near side bay, and two long ones atop on each horn.

CULBONE STABLES : ANTHONY RIDES OFF WITH TUFTERS.



A glorious run took place at a by-meet on the Friday preceding the opening meet of 1893 from Culbone Stables, when a good galloping straight-necked stag was roused in Metcombe Plantations and sent straight to the Forest. The tufters had been at work only a few minutes when they opened on this gallant beast, who beat round the head of Lillicombe, and then sinking to the Weir water at Robber's Bridge, set his head proudly for the open by way of Mill Hill. Even from the first it was evident that scent was not of the very best or strongest, the pack dashing off with a rather uncertain drive, but over the open moorland a degree or two of scent more or less seems to matter but little; the swampy surface always holds scent enough to enable hounds to outpace all horses but the very best and boldest.

And now let me take you with me for the next three glorious hours, into which a life-time of exciting events were crowded, but let it be in the spirit and not in the flesh, I pray, for every pound avoirdupois will be a sore encumbrance ere we help Anthony to administer the "coup de grace" to that flying red form that has just disappeared over the crest of Mill Hill in the sunshine. Let us trot up the side of the Chalk Water for a little and slip off to the Deer Park as quickly as we can, for hounds have started and will be there before us. Gently

up the side of Oldhay Ridge; it will never do to knock the wind out of the plucky Irishman beneath us just yet. How he pulls and fights, to be sure! Fit to jerk one's arms from the sockets. But he will soon give that up unless I am much mistaken. Now let us slip gingerly across Blindwell Combe by the narrow sheep-track. There go the hounds racing for the larch plantation in Landcombe, and there goes Mr. Snow, leading a small squadron of cavalry for the gate into the Turf Allotment. Something is wrong with the Deer Park gate. Never mind! let us tip over the fence and show the twenty or so behind us the way. "That is the style," says Anthony, who is remounting, as the good grey lands us well out on the yonder side. Now harden your heart, my friend, and we will sail away for all we are worth to regain the two minutes lost at the fence, all down the half-mile slope of the Deer Park to the head of the Doone Path, through the knee-deep heather and spongy green grass. There go the hounds just sinking to the Badgworthy Water, and we must race like the wind if we are to be in time. There goes a herd of fourteen deer by Woodcock Combe—that old rascal, Galloper, is driving them—and there goes a great heavy stag straight for Brendon Two Gates up the long slope of Badgworthy Hill, but our stag has crossed the water lower

down; there are the hounds struggling up through the fern on the steep side of Badgworthy Lees. Will they cross Lankcombe? Well, we can't wait to see! Down to the Doone Valley at full trot, splash through the rippling brown water, fresh and full after last night's rain, away by the Shepherd's Cott, and away at full gallop over Withycombe Ridge. How lucky! there go the hounds across our front, from right to left; now we shall get on terms with them, but we must navigate round the bog on our left. Well done, good horse! you don't seem to pull much now, do you? There are those will-o-the-wisps crossing Hoccombe Hill, and that is surely Michael leading, fleetest of them all. Now, will they turn down Hoccombe Water, or will they turn up to Two Gates! Thank goodness, they are bending to the right, and now we know that we are in for it, and perhaps twenty more, and that the rest of the goodly field that assembled at Culbone is simply nowhere.

Going down the side of Clannon Ball they dwell for a moment where some sheep and ponies have foiled the line, but soon set themselves right again, and dash over the Farley Water and away over Cheriton Ridge. Now let us cannily follow Mr. Bathurst, the Master of the Exmoor, who is sailing along on that dark chestnut with the white star, for we have

left "terra firma" far behind and the land of bogs and peat holes is looming large just ahead. There are the hounds streaming up from the Hoar Oak Water, hard by Gammon's Corner, pointing straight for the head of the West Lynn, and here are we by the wall dividing Exe Plain from Cheriton Ridge. What shall we do, go to them, or make for Pinkerry Pond? Mr. Snow says the latter, so off we go over a series of horribly trappy drainage gutters, but our good horse has got his eye on 'em, and pumped though he is, puts in never a foot, but hops cannily over and is ready for the next. Now along by the wall, in Indian file in the one sound path, full of water though it be: it is the only sound path in the long dreary expanse of the Chains. On and on we go, past Pinkerry Pond and upwards towards Chapman's Barrow, but never a sign of the hounds: where on earth can they have got to? Has our cast been in vain? Why here's a stag coming to meet us, and by all that's great and good he is the hunted one! His mouth is fast closed; no, he opens it again, and the great white flecks of foam fly on the wind, as he plunges heavily through swamp after swamp in his long labouring gallop. He's going back to the Pond to soil; let us wait till the hounds come up, every moment's breathing time will help our horses. There comes the string of bobbing heads, toiling

up the sky-line of the enclosure from which the stag has come, Anthony's hunting cap first, and the rest at intervals, and here come the hounds streaming over the fence from the direction of Tinerley.

Down in the gorge below us is a shepherd with his collie rounding up a little flock of the prick-eared Cheviot sheep ; how surprised the man looks at the sudden incursion on his solitude ! At one moment he fancies himself far away from human ken and at the next he is aware of a panting labouring stag, after which his collie courses ; then come a string of hounds running mute, but always striding on. Then the nearing twang of the horn sounds on his ear, and two little parties of pursuers converge on the line from right and left, ploughing along through the morasses, their horses in every different stage of exhaustion. Now let us turn tail and scamper away back with what speed we may, by the very same path we have come, for the stag does not mean soiling in the pond, but is careering along the ridge of the Chains, passing within a hundred yards of the tempting little loch now shining blue under the August sky. Now we are back at last on Exe Plain, and there are the hounds running fast, in a close drawn string, down the side of Long Chains Combe to the round ruin at the ford. Now they check at the water and for about ten

minutes Anthony casts around for the line. Let us seize the opportunity to jump on our second horse, a trusty veteran this who has seen more deer killed in her time than either you or I. Surely that is a hound speaking somewhere, and there he is, that is old Trueman up under the southern wall of Exe Plain yonder, and he has found the line and is hunting away merrily all by himself. So sound your whistle, Sidney, and call up Anthony from the depths of that lonely ravine, and let us cram on the pack before Trueman gets out of reach. How they speak to it now, as they regain the line and sweep over Exe Plain towards Blackpits Gate !

Quick to the crossing or they will distance us ; now over the road and away over the swampy surface of Little Buscombe and Great Buscombe. How horribly trappy the endless gutters are, black and overgrown, with running water at the bottom ! One after another they come, some wide and visible, others narrow and treacherous. But we must keep galloping all the same and give the old mare her head ; she has negotiated many a thousand of them and won't deceive us now. All down the length of Trout Hill we go, putting on steam a little where the slope is in our favour. We have the advantage of hounds now, as they bend to our right into the upper part of Badgworthy Water. On Little Tom's Hill just before us come two

horsemen, our genial Secretary and the Hon. J. S. Trefusis, all the way from the slopes of the Quantock Hills. From the way they face it is evident that the stag must be at soil between us, and sure enough there he is. One view halloo and away he goes up Manor Allotment, meeting the Exmoor kennel huntsman, whose fresh horse comes in most opportunely for his master to change to. Hounds are dwelling a little, the hot sunshine must be affecting the scent, but now they stream away again over Kittucks, taking advantage of Anthony's contingent who are keeping down the left bank of Stowford Bottom, and we have got them all to ourselves. Up Hoscombe they run slowly still and past Black Barrow and indeed they seem so beat as to be hardly able to face the quickly succeeding slopes.

Now they cross to the upper fork of the Weir Water and work right up to Lucott Cross. One more effort and we are over the ridge of Lucott Moor, down go the hounds into Little Hill Combe, and there is the fugitive, fairly run up. Now, watch him as he breaks from his bay and almost rushes over those women picking whortleberries. See, how he squats in the fern until every hound has passed by, see Anthony running up through the ferns, and Mr. C. Birmingham directing him from opposite. Now they rouse him again, and down he comes

to water, crashing through the bracken and the thorn bushes. A few more dodges and rushes, and he falls into the Nutscale Water, and the good hounds fall over him. Now, quick and help drag him out, put your foot on his off antler, and keep back the hounds and Anthony will be here in a moment. It is just three hours exactly since the pack was laid on at Robber's Bridge, and the hounds have covered a point measuring twenty and a-half miles on the map, to say nothing of their ascents and descents and their turnings and twistings round the shoulders of the combes and along the bends of the moorland streams. The stag has brow, bay and tray on the off horn, with a long upright and an offer, and on the near horn has brow, tray and two atop. He is a good galloping four-year-old, and as fat as ever he can be. He is the fifth deer already killed this season.

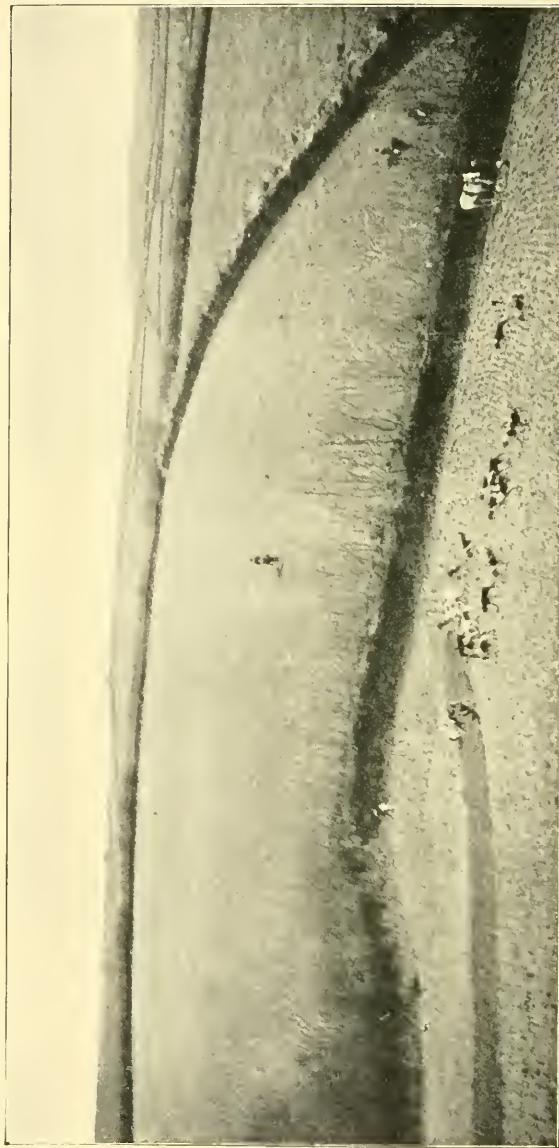
Thus did Colonel Hornby inaugurate his tenure of office in a wet and chilly July with a three hours' gallop of the very best and with five deer taken on by-days. The open moor held but few deer in those days and Culbone and Horner stags were chary of crossing the Weir water, still, when once a real forester was afoot, the sport ruled all the better in consequence. Colonel Hornby's best runs, however, as in this instance and the following one, were generally with young deer. A few

days previous to this great run Mr. Sanders' marriage with Miss Lucy Halliday, of Glenthorne, was solemnised at Oare Church.

From much abused Haddon, one of the good old-fashioned runs, of which bygone generations of staghunters were wont to tell, took place on Monday, September 18th, 1893. Miles had reported a good stag in Haddon Wood, and Anthony was sent to tuft for him soon after eleven, with almost immediate success. But he took an unpromising line, dashed across Hartford Cleave, and at the same time a male three-year-old that had been following him turned back through Haddon Wood, and headed right away to Peter's Piece, with one couple of hounds in full chase. Preferring this line Col. Hornby touched his horn as a signal to Anthony, a little conversation was carried on under slight difficulties between Miles at Wind Corner and Anthony at Clammer, and by 12.30 the pack had been unkennelled and were being taken with all speed down the lane to Bury Village. On again we trotted to the Hele Bridge meadows and the Exe under Rookwood, and hounds opened on the line. Up now into Pixton Park, but here hounds are at fault; however, one of Lady Carnavon's gardeners has seen the deer passing the Jury quarry pit, and Anthony brings them to the line. Down by the palings they go, and round by

the pond discoursing sweetly under the trees, and then alas it is "Ware buck! Ware doe! Ware fawn!" from a score of throats, as Grappler and Prompter break from the red deer's line and race amongst the dappled herd before their eyes, leading some of the veterans astray by their example. Ah! you puppies! Now, Anthony, read the riot act! Quick, Sidney and Barber, drop your thongs into 'em; this will never do! Now down to Newbridge and let us try fresh ground, away from all this venison. There's the line right enough, just above Newbridge, over the river and road and up into Eller's Wood! Now we must canter up the fields outside the wood and be ready for 'em 'ere they break away to Combe. How they dwell in the wood! The deer must have been doubling about, drawing for others. Here they come though, through the fence, and there is a view halloo above the upper Combe Plantation. Hounds are faltering on the clay pastures, so Anthony lifts them to the four cross ways, and a little below on the Gulland road is shown the place where the deer has passed, nearly an hour before. Now they are off again, over the fields! Here's a flight of hurdles! Crack! crack! in two places at once! Ah, my friends, if you can't clear them you might just as well pull one up and walk through; you will have plenty of company. Now down the hill into a

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NEAR WEST ANSTEY.

deep, deep combe, and right up beyond. Hounds are on our right and running but slowly. Here they come up, towards the Molland road, and are quite at fault. Anthony lifts them to Five Cross Ways, and then trots down the lane that leads to All Ways End.

In the fields on the left he hits the line again, and hounds are bearing for Armoor Wood when a lusty halloo from the direction of Rhyll sets all on the alert. Mr. Hawker shews the way down a most convenient hunting path, and we are soon at Rhyll, where Mr. Dawkins and his merry men all are on the alert. "Oh ! yes ! the deer has passed about ten minutes since, bearing for Whiterocks." On we go ! There's his slot on the road plain enough, but hounds cannot own it. Now we are on the heather again and away they dart at a very different pace to what they have shewn before. Over the upper corner of East Anstey Common they fling through the dark wet heather, with sterns lashing, not quite settled to the line yet, but plainly getting more eager at every moment. Now they are in Venford Common and running like mad. Out we go, by the gate at Anstey Barrows, Mr. J. Clatworthy has the lead ; perhaps he sees them ; it is more than we can, driving against the misty rain at this pace. Miss Musgrave's horse falls heavily over a cart rut and lies still, but she gets up and disentangles

herself and comes on again presently, but little the worse. Meanwhile we have scampered past the head of Longstones combe, and sunk to the Danesbrook at the corner of Lyshwell Wood. Here are hounds in the water; they are at fault, and a good thing too, for the path in Shircombe Brake is steep, and the pace has made horses blow already. Anthony casts his beauties up stream, and that failing, tries the Cloggs side of the wood and hits the line again. Away we gallop, through Shircombe courtyard and away to Cloggs Down; hounds were in Devonshire a moment since, now they are in Somerset once more. Spur how we may, they are still gaining on us; they are fairly racing now, over the moory surface of Hawkridge Plain and away by Porchester Post; how they speak on the wet ground; Here's an obstacle; a yawning watercourse, some four feet over, then a high bank with some ancient thorn boughs laid on it, and perhaps a ditch on the far side. Mr. J. Clatworthy is on his feet in a trice and scales the rampart, but the gallant roan cob is a trifle too quick for him and hurries him rudely into the next field on hands and head. No damage is done however, and away he goes, leading the van as usual. Now we are on Withypool Common; and there are the hounds crossing the two Knighton combes below and bending

to the left for Landacre Bridge. Here are certain springs and streamlets, and one of them entraps Barber's horse, the big lop-eared chestnut Sunbeam, and down he comes a regular thump. The horse is too much shaken to rise again at once, but presently he struggles to his feet, registering vows, no doubt, that he will take care to jump when he next meets a blind water course. Up stream go the hounds, till nearly at Sherdon Hutch, when a fisherman is encountered who is able to give very valuable information. The stag has blanchéd at sight of him and borne straight over Landacre Common through the ferns to the Picked Stones fields on the plain above. Anthony stops hounds for a few minutes and gives his field a welcome chance to close up, for horses are failing now, even the very best of them; the pace and the soft ground have thinned the ranks to some purpose. Away go the hounds up the slope, flashing prettily to right and left, then over the Picked Stones fields, and away by the White Water till close to Honeymead. Here they check and we pick up a recruit in the person of Mr. R. L. Riccard, who is just in time to see a very pretty finish. Casting back to the White Water, hounds own the foil for an instant just opposite Ash Plantation and then throw up again, but while Anthony is in doubt a tail hound speaks loud and plain.

All eyes turn to the spot, and there sure enough is this gallant little stag that has led us so far and so fast, toiling up the steep slope opposite, so stiff that he can hardly raise a trot. One tally and a cheer to his hounds, and Anthony sinks the combe, climbs the other side and settles them on the line. Away they go over Winstitchen, pointing for Flexburrow, but the sight of the buildings of Wheal Eliza has turned the stag, and he has beaten down the Barle. On downwards for a few hundred yards, and then in the limpid water hounds run right over their deer as he crouches in an attempt to hide. Another moment and all is over with him. He proves to be in poorish condition, with the near brow antler broken short off, and has two tines on the near top and the upright on the off. The fifteenth deer of the season, and the time of the run three hours and three-quarters; the latter half of it exceedingly fast. That veteran staghunter, Mr. J. B. Collyns, was going strong throughout this run, which ranks easily first among the three notable runs from Haddon scored by Colonel Hornby. Encircled as the Haddon Coverts are by enclosed country, there is no doubt that their deer have not scope or range sufficient to enable them to lead hounds as gallantly as do their first cousins, but when once they have left the deep wooded combes of Exe and Barle behind they can gallop as stoutly

and as straight over the great grass ranges of southern Exmoor as ever a Culbone stag can stride across the heather of Porlock Allotment or the green swamps of Acmead. Their blood is the same, their instincts are the same, only the better feeding and the warmer lying makes their heads heavier and their haunches better filled.



CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK STAG OF BADGWORTHY—FROM BLACK PITTS TO BRATTON COURT—THE GREAT QUANTOCK STAG—THE OLDEST STAG ON RECORD—FROM OARE TO BRATTON FLEMING—MR. SANDERS' FIRST BIG STAG—THE OPENING DAY OF 1895—FROM POPHAM WOOD TO BADGWORTHY—EIGHTEEN MILES ON THE SOUTH FOREST—THE GREAT “NOTT” STAG—A RUN FROM HAWKCOMBE HEAD.



the year, and the interest increased by the fact that the quarry was no other than the big stag of Badgworthy, known as “the Black Stag.” A field of about one hundred was first conducted to Larkbarrow from the meet at Hawkcombe Head, being

THE staghunting season of 1893 was concluded on Monday, October 22nd, so far as the Porlock side of the country is concerned, with a brilliant performance that may fairly rank amongst the best runs of



LANKCOMBE.

just in time to take shelter from a cold and drenching shower of rain and hail, and hounds were duly kennelled in the farm buildings. Two couple and a half of tufters were first drawn, but, on consideration, the master had one couple of these returned to kennel, leaving three hounds for Anthony to work with. A move was now made for Mr. Snow's Deer Park, keeping warily to leeward of the fence on South Common, so as to approach the deer up wind, but no sooner had keeper Steer held the gate open for the calvacade to enter, than a herd of some sixteen hinds, with a good stag in attendance, was seen speeding away over the brown expanse to Landcombe. The great black stag was supposed to be in the little combe facing the Doone Valley with three others, but when the tufters entered it, it proved to be empty of deer. Ten deer, in bunches of two and three, could now be seen stealing away over Badgworthy Hill, making a total of twenty-seven already roused, without a glimpse of the veteran; a noble herd, maintained and preserved by that best of all supporters of staghunting, Mr. Nicholas Snow.

The tufters were now laid on the line of the big herd, to see if they would lead up to the famous stag, and they had not been long out of sight amongst the larches in Landcombe before deer began to move in all directions.

Two good stags and a male deer broke away from Badgworthy Wood over Black Hill at sound of the horn, and took an excellent line towards Dry Bridges, looking quite yellow in the bright sunshine. And now came the sensation of the day.

While Miles was levelling his field glass at the retreating stags, the monarch of the forest suddenly made his appearance, followed by another and smaller stag. Now, in an instant, all doubt is at end. The cunning old veteran—that for so many a year has saved his life by wily stratagems, that has eluded Arthur and Anthony again and again, that has come to be regarded as no better than a fabulous myth, so much has he been talked about and so seldom seen—stands confessed. Here he comes towards us, with mighty head held high and proud. Black he is not, only a darker brown than usual, especially about the poll, but in the weird misty air of the moor he looks at a little distance distinctly blacker than any other of the numerous deer we have just seen. But it is by the proud carriage of his head, and the square upward set of his spreading antlers that one may know him amongst a herd of other deer.

He carries all his rights of course, and one can see three long spiky tines at least on either top. Have at him now! Ride off the other stag; and frighten him all you can, that he may

go straight away and clear all these crossing foils. Well done, Mr. Adams! Now he flies to some purpose; see his flanks rolling in his bounding gallop:—

“ And now the good stag flies before
His deep-mouthed foes across the moor,
And swifter than the morning wind
Leaves Badgworthy, far, far behind;
Then breasts the distant hills, nor feels
The peaty turf with flying heels,
Now sniffs the wreathing mist that laves
The purple moor, whose rolling waves
Of grass and heather, far and nigh,
Grow dark against the thund’rous sky.”

Now stop your tufters, Anthony, while we watch his line. There he goes yonder over the yellow moorgrass on Badgworthy Hill, and there go two little yearling deer, racing after him, bother 'em! They will spoil sport to a certainty. Now he sinks into the combe that holds the Hoccombe Water, and so do they. Let us watch. Yes, there he goes, right up over the crest of Lanacombe, against the sky, and there's one at least of the little deer still toiling after him. Anthony has gone to confer with Colonel Hornby, and the pack will most likely be coming along in five minutes; let us trot down to the ford and splash through Badgworthy Water and see how many of the field come up to the scratch when hounds are laid on. Yes, here come the hounds right enough, and here comes the field in two

divisions and some straggling groups. Ninety-four all told, and the odd half dozen, at least, are skirting about on distant hilltops. Colonel Hornby holds council, and decides to kennel again at the Shepherd's Cott, and hunt the line with two tufters, till the stag shall have been separated from his comrades. Bluster and Dalesman are drawn, fourth and fifth season hounds, steady and sure, and warranted to stop when called upon. Anthony and Arthur ride off over Lanacombe, and the field await with what patience they may the turn of events. The two tufters take up the line near a rushy patch on the top of Lanacombe, and carry it over to the water of the streamlet under Buscombe; then falter at the water for a minute, and anon carry it around towards Trout Hill. There go five big hinds before them; that won't do! Anthony brings them back to the streamlet and, at its very source, hits a line. Away they go, hunting steadily over Blackpits, running parallel with the Exe, Bluster doing all the work, and looking backwards from time to time to see if he must go on or not. He comes to the head of the little valley that leads down to the ruined building in Long Chains Combe, and crosses it pointing straight for the Chains. "Hold hard, Bluster," there is a slot in a muddy sheep-track, but it won't do; it must be the big stag or nothing to-day. Now Anthony trots along the

steep side overlooking Hoar Oak Water ; perhaps the veteran may have stopped in that lonely stream ; but no, there's nothing there. Now he and Arthur trot slowly back towards Blackpits in disconsolate frame, all the skill and deer-craft of past and present allied, but quite discomfited. Where can the phantom stag have got to ?

There are lines all over the place ; any one of them may be his. How can they tell now which to follow ? No friendly halloo to guide them in this dreary solitude, no chance to detect the fugitive's slot in this wide expanse of swampy grass. No human being nearer than Huccombe Hill, or Hoar Oak Cottage ; in the distance a few moor ponies grazing, and on every hill some sheep. But stop ! why are those sheep huddled so there in Blackpits beside the Farley Water ? What do they see that Anthony cannot ? The wind is from him to them ; if it be deer, they will be off in another moment. Tally ho ! there they go ! the two-year-old staglings and a hind, and by all that's lucky, there is the black stag with them still. Now Bluster and Dalesman, have at 'em, my boys ! But not a bit ; there seems to be some magic by reason of which hounds cannot hunt this deer. There are the deer still going, and there's Mr. Charles Glass. Now will they take it up or no ? Yes, they are off at last, and at what a

pace ! Now, my old friend, you must look alive, or they will be at your haunches in a few minutes. Splash, splash, jump, splash, stagger, jump—all the way down over Buscombe, a treacherous drainage gutter, and as blind as a bag, every twenty-two yards, to say nothing of cross ones. "I've seen many a fall hereabouts," says Arthur, by way of encouragement, and one can quite believe it too. Here's the Trout Hill fence, and the ground is a little sounder. See, here they crossed ; there's the stag's great slot and the hound's pads, but the hinds are parted ; now we shall have sport. Away down Trout Hill as hard as we can go, for the top Badgworthy crossing. There's a whipper-in galloping in the grassy corner of Manor Allotment opposite. He stops ! there are two white dots beside him. He has stopped 'em, and all is well. The field come speeding up from Badgworthy Water full of eager enquiry, and delight spreads from face to face as the news flies from one to another that the big stag has been fairly separated and driven away at last, for the interval of waiting on Hoccombe Hill has been long and cold and dreary, and there is now every prospect of a brilliant run. In a very few minutes hounds have been brought from the Doone Valley, Anthony has changed horses, and they are off like pigeons just as the ominous growl of an approaching thunderstorm makes itself heard.

Up Manor Allotment and into Kittucks they stream, stringing out in the breathless race, then bend to the right over Acmead, and fling into Hurdle Down. The high beech fences have not turned the fugitive, nor do they check hounds long, but they falter a little amongst the sodden heather ere they sink into Nutscale. But see now how they fling over Wilmersham Plain, and dive into Dadycombe ! How they speak at the water, and what an eager blood-thirsty burst of tongue it is ! Not a moment do they dwell now, but while we are climbing the path out of Langcombe, they are dashing over Stoke Ridge into Bagley.

There they go again, not a hundred yards ahead, packed closely together as they rise from Sweetworthy Combe. Now the rain beats down upon our luckless heads, blurring everything, drenching one to the skin ; but this is no time to think of putting on coats and aprons. Hark what a cry in Allercombe. Have they come up with him ? No, 'tis three hinds jumping up. There they go back and the pack divides, but Anthony sets them right in a twinkling and gallops forward past the head of Hollowcombe and upwards for Robin Howe. The heavy rain has done its work though and washed the soil. Slowly and doubtfully hounds fling from right to left, yet ever trending towards the direction of Brockwell. Now comes

the first view halloo ; someone sees the stag picking his way into Lucombe Allers, but hounds are drawing nearer to him, this time unaided. There comes a burst of music from the shelter of the trees, and then they are off over the Holnicote Vale, by way of Lucombe Mill and Blackford, with their deer only just a field or two ahead. Now they enter Road Wood and cross a field with a stiff line of hurdles in it as they enter Great Wood. The pheasants fly in from the stubbles to right and left as the sounds of the chase approach, but hounds soon leave the wood again and bear up for Cockerhills. Here their deer must have waited for them, for a ding-dong chase began along the southern slopes of the Great North Hill by Old Brake and Wydon, and within a field of Bratton Court hounds brought him to a standstill at 4.35. He proved to be not over heavy or fat, and his teeth evidenced great age. Besides his twelve points he carried an offer of a thirteenth on his near top. A straighter necked or a stouter hearted deer one need never wish to see, and I trust Mr. Snow may keep many such amongst his goodly herd for future years.

From time to time certain deer become known by some peculiarity of shape or colour, and in spite of this disadvantage still contrive to elude the huntsman's knife and attain a ripe old age. As instances of this, many will recall

the great Nott stag of Dunkery, whose last wild race for life is narrated on a subsequent page. The switch-horned stag of Haddon, who shed his malformed horn and died at Couple Ham fighting with two normal horns, and scratching such horses as came within his reach. The old one-horned stag of Cothelstone, who charged amongst the field at Kingston St. Mary, and the great stag of Stoodleigh.

At the time of writing there flourishes on Dunkery an old one-horned stag, with at least four points atop on his single beam, who travels much the same line of country as the black stag was wont to. But the black stag roused more curiosity than all the other marked deer of the past two decades, and not a few were incredulous as to his existence until he was safely hung up by the heels at Bratton Court. The legend of his existence had been going for several years, but it came to a sudden and a glorious end on that October afternoon in 1893.

Friday, October 25th, 1893, was the last day of the legitimate season, but an additional by-day was held on Saturday, magnificent deer being killed on each occasion. On the former day, the meet was at Bagborough Plantation Gate as of yore, and was not very largely attended, later arrivals, however, swelling the ranks of the mounted field to about one hundred all told.

Barber's harbouring operations had been favoured with success, the freshly moistened state of the ground, partly re-dried on top, being most suitable for his task in the earlier hours of the morning. High up in Cockercombe where the fringe of oaks and coppice dwindles to a mere belt in the bottom of the goyle, he had detected the presence of two stags, one of them being an unusually fine one. Soon after Colonel Hornby's arrival at the trysting place, hounds were moved off, to be kennelled as usual at Quantock Farm before tufting was commenced. With a draft of three couple and a half, Anthony was now sent to Cockercombe to draw for the big deer, and with almost immediate success. Descending to One Tree Bottom by the well-worn path, with his tufters at his heel, and Miles in attendance on a neat black cob, the little procession was soon lost to sight amongst the tall trees in the dingle. Cheerful sounds soon arose, however, as the tufters struck the line, and Anthony's cheery voice rose clear as a silver bell above their chorus. Down the main valley they swept, waking the echoes with their melody, till opposite the Devil's Elbow, and then turned short up again as if to break upon Parsonage Side. All of a sudden they divided; one part drove a stag through the tree stems up the combe, while the other, consisting of two hounds only, drove the

big stag from his stronghold in Cockercombe towards Seven Wells. Some two couple and a half stuck to the smaller deer, which would have been warrantable enough had no better been present, and he was soon to be seen mounting the open hillside with thoughts intent on Bagborough. No sooner had he gained the open, however, than he was fairly headed back into covert by pedestrians. This bit of bad luck did not interfere with the day's sport, for the big stag was being steadily hunted away through Great Wood till he came down to the water in a rushy meadow low down in Seven Wells. Here he stood at bay for a while with one hound facing him, but on more coming up, the tuneful sound of the bay was exchanged for an eager yelping chase up the length of Ashley Combe. Mr. Grandfield was in his usual position near Govett's Copse, and obtained a good view of the stag as he galloped up to the Stowey Road, pointing for the Camel and his Driver, while Colonel Hornby followed his movements from the distance of Lord's Ball. No sooner had the latter obtained a glimpse of the magnificent spread of his antlers against the skyline than he set off with all speed towards Quantock Farm to liberate the pack, blowing loudly as he went. Anthony meanwhile was diligently hunting the smaller stag, which by the way carried two long tines on either top,

besides brows and trays, but on hearing the chorus of view halloas and the notes of the horn soon made his appearance.

Hounds were no sooner laid on than they swung round into the Soggs, stringing out amongst the tough tangle of low growing scrub, a darting swaying line of black and white amongst the russet brown of the dying leaf. Keeping high up, they pressed from one wing to the other in Butterfly Combe, and as they neared the uppermost fringe of the western point the stag could be seen stealing out just before them. Away over Hareknaps he went, increasing his distance at every stride, but passing close before his two deadliest enemies, Colonel Hornby and Anthony, to wit. Past the tall poles at the end of the path-heads and away into Holford Combe he led them, and there for a moment they were at fault beside the stream. Anthony soon set them right, and then they brought it to a point in the same combe much higher up, and checked again most inexplicably. A timely view halloo from the secretary and the second whipper-in, who had met the stag standing panting on the summit of Willoughby Cleave, ere he lumbered off at a slow trot towards Erridge Combe, brought Anthony up to the table-land atop, and hounds were soon flying again as fast as they could pick their way over the prickly stubbly

furze on their way to St. Audries. Blown though he was, the gallant beast had leapt the high deer fence and entered the park, and the leading hounds, with Michael at their head, were soon pressing him through the square gorse inside, amongst the retreating forms of the park deer, and downwards near the Rectory. Beating up the combe within the deer park, he tried to ascend, but the leading hounds got at him and raced him down again to a gate, by which he got out, the field scattering to right and left. Leaping the chain fence of the churchyard in and out, he staggered on to the house and entered the front conservatory. Amidst a crash of flower pots and ornamental plants he was borne to the ground and secured. Mr. Elliot Lees, the new Conservative candidate for Taunton, being one of the first to lay hands on him—a task of no slight danger in that confined space. The head was the finest ever killed in the West Country, numbering four on one top and four and an offer on the other. Some of the measurements are worthy of notice: Round outer curve of near horn, 36in.; width across at the fork, $30\frac{1}{4}$ in. from inside to outside; perpendicular height, 29in.; size round beam at fork, $7\frac{1}{2}$ in., and same between brow and bay; outer curve of brows, 14in.

This head, mounted originally with the hair on, graces the hall at St. Audries, the seat of



THE ST. AUDRIES HEAD.

Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, and claims to be the largest wild trophy ever secured in the British Islands. Other heads run it close, notably one killed near Stoodleigh by the Tiverton Staghounds; but for sheer weight of beam it will probably never be surpassed. This stag, for all his massive proportions, showed no fight whatever when run to bay.

An aged deer, long past all ordinary mark, was taken early in the next season after a meet at Exford, another stag roused with him being subsequently hunted and secured.

On arriving at Cloutsham on Friday, the 15th August, 1894, I learnt some interesting details as to the age of the first of the two Court Wood stags killed on Wednesday at Larcombe Foot. It appears that no less than seventeen years ago the deer was taken alive when less than two years old, and having been somewhat injured by the hounds was, by the late Mr. Bisset's orders, turned out again some time afterwards, when fully recovered. From that date to the present time, he would seem to have secluded himself so effectually as to have avoided hounds and huntsman altogether. The marks on his ears, which, I am told, were placed there by Mr. Bawden, of Hawkridge, were what is technically known as a "square halfpenny" and a "swallow tail." It will be remembered that his head, though wide-spreading

and heavy in the beam, boasted only brows and trays, with two and an offer atop ; this, I fear, would interfere sadly with the rules and principles as to age of deer lately laid down in a correspondence appearing in the columns of *The West Somerset Free Press*, which I, for one, followed with much interest. The stag's injuries received in his early days would account no doubt for his remarkably small weight, seven score, while his mask and slot were those of a four-year-old hind.

In old age, or after severe injuries, there can be no doubt that deer decline in their horns as well as in their bodily proportions, the beam becoming thinner and smoother and assuming weaker curves from year to year, but long brow antlers, even though thin, are a sure characteristic of old deer.

On Monday, August 27th, 1894, drawing with the pack was resorted to, for a heavy stag had been harboured by himself by George Barwick in Hollacombe Wood, almost opposite Mr. Snow's, at Oare. Mr. Christopher Birmingham was the first to view him as he rose from his lair in the short oak scrub, and his rousing "Tally ho!" was quickly followed by Anthony's cheer and Sidney's quick note with the whistle. In three minutes the wood was made too hot to hold him, and he raced away for Lillycombe where two other stags got up, one of them a

"nott" stag of great size. Meanwhile the hunted stag was crossing Hookway Hill for the Weir Water, with hounds not far behind him. As he rose to the skyline on Mill Hill, he stood at gaze for an instant, showing his spreading horns against the blue and then bore away for the Forest at best speed, pointing for Three Combes Foot. Up Stowford Bottom go the hounds, and Anthony stops them at the top to give the stragglers time for a very welcome breathing space, and then they begin to race again by way of Manor Allotment to the Badgworthy Water under Clannacombe. Now they are toiling up Badgworthy Hill opposite ; we must get over, and that quickly, or we shall be handsomely left behind, for they are bearing away for Brendon Two Gates with sterns down and in hot earnest. As they rise again from the head-springs of the Hoccombe Water there are four or five deer before them flying across the road at Brendon Two Gates, but the stag is not with them ; he has played the old, old trick of changing, and done it with great success, for nowhere can he be seen or heard of, and hounds break away at such a speed after the fresh deer that they are not stopped till Sidney gets to them far down the Farley Water a mile and a-half away. Two couple and a-half divide upon a strapping great hind which heads right away for Pinkery, but come back eventually to

Lanacombe, to which Anthony has by that time returned, in casting back. At last the welcome news is signalled from the Deer Park that the stag has been viewed stealing back from the direction of Trout Hill, and has laid up in the smallest of the Deer Park plantations. When hounds are brought there, however, he is found to have moved into Clannacombe. Out of the larches he bounds, driving three yearling deer before him, but Captain Curzon and Mr. C. H. Glass set to work and cut him out after a dash over the heather, short, sharp and decisive. This is warm work, as their horses testify, but they have done yeoman service, and that in the nick of time, for now he is away by himself, and heading right away for Farley. It is nearly four o'clock, and horses have lost their first freshness, but as we sink to Hoar Oak from Cheriton Ridge we begin to overhaul hounds somewhat. As we gain Furze Hill we see them running over Lynton Common above Gammon's Corner, pointing straight for Parracombe. In the next little stream we come up with them; the stag has just left the wire fence on the ridge above us not five minutes before them. Horses can only climb slowly now, but hounds cannot exactly fly either; ten couple are up, and the rest are like the boy in "*Casabianca*." Let us look round now as the good little horse that has carried us so well splashes through the tiny

stream of the Warcombe Water, eagerly burying his muzzle in the cool brown eddy as he goes. Seventeen is the number of the field all told, of which three are scarlets, and where, oh where, are the hundred and fifty or so that started so gaily from Hollacombe Wood this morning? Now we are up amongst the first enclosures that we have encountered for many a mile, and there goes the stag up yonder, crossing that marshy field above those bullocks. How he rolls and staggers; he is ours if only hounds and horses can live with him for another half hour. A boundary sheep fence, four feet or more of stone ditching and two stout wires atop, necessitates a long detour, and hounds have to be stopped for nearly twenty minutes. Going on again, they touch the extreme head of Parracombe and leave Tinerley on the right, but hunting very slowly from field to field. As they near Wistland Pound, 'tis plain the stag has been jumping the gates, high as they are in this country. Over one gate after another he has gone, with never a mark on the top rail, no timber rapping for him. There's his slot though, plain enough in the black mud; what a thumping big stag he must be! Coming to the Martinhoe Road, the field gains a lady in accession, and two or three horsemen, as they sink towards the Bratton coverts. Mr. Huxtable, of Gratton, lends Anthony his horse, comparatively fresh,

and by that very timely aid enables him to kill his deer handsomely. The bulk of the pack change to a hind in Twitchen Wood, but he stops them by Button Bridge, and meanwhile Sidney is busy with the stag with only three hounds under Honacott. Breaking away, he conceals himself until Anthony returns with the rest of the hounds, and then a few turns up and down the water quickly finish him. A real forest king, with a royal head of twelve perfect points, the velvet clean gone. A very difficult stag to take; the tenth of the season; time, seven hours and a quarter; the pace at first quite fast enough, but slow towards the end. A lemon-coloured hound called Sovereign seized this stag by the flank, and never released his hold though carried for some distance through the air. Nearly half of those who saw the finish lay out at Simonsbath that night.

The new master, Mr. R. A. Sanders, held his first by-day at Hawkridge on Friday, July 19th, 1895, after a soaking night's rain, which made the country perfectly rideable. Anthony was sent to tuft in Rincombe Wood, on Lord Clinton's estate, and soon roused two warrantable stags, which both went away over Molland Common, following each other's tracks. Seven couple of puppies and double that number of old hounds were laid on the foil of the second and larger stag, after he had been

allowed half an hour's law. Fresh finding him in Whiterocks, they chased him merrily all down the Barle Valley and across to the Exe, and here roused him from soil again. At the Haddeo hounds checked, but the stag was viewed stealing away from Haddon Wood, and after twenty minutes' pretty water hunting under the Deer Park, he was taken at Steart Cottage. This remarkable stag stood before hounds for three hours after the lay on, in spite of his great size, eleven score and seven pounds clean weight, minus head and slots. He was a perfect fourteen pointer, with the velvet still on, of course, but the points were hardened underneath the velvety covering. His head measured as follows :—Height, 30in.; length round curve of near horn, 35in.; spread at fork, outside to inside, 29in.; curve of brow antlers, $14\frac{1}{2}$ in.; girth of beam, 7in. A very fine head for the British Islands.

Seldom has the chase been better seen on the opening day by the multitude assembled on Cloutsham Ball than it was on August 7th, 1895, the first year of Mr. Sanders' mastership. The run itself lasted only about an hour, but the stag, in his doubles, led hounds and field to and fro in sight of the farm, to the great delight of the foot and carriage folk, who moved from field to field on the Cloutsham Ridge, and kept the Hunt in view for some time.

CLOUTSHAM BALL FROM WEBBER'S POST.



The stag of the day was a veteran well worthy of the occasion, carrying a heavy and wide-spreading beam, with three long tines atop on either side, and long brows and trays, but the bay antlers were missing. He was first roused in Hole Wood, then up the combe between Wilmersham and Stoke, whence he might with ease have slipped away to the open moor, and have led his pursuers to Badgworthy, or distant Farley, but he trusted to the woods and streams of Horner to escape Anthony's attentions, little wotting of the many hundred pairs of eyes that would fasten on him if he should show for a moment in any unsheltered space within a mile of Cloutsham, or guessing at the scream that would presently go up from a hundred lusty West Country throats, nor thinking of Sidney's tell-tale whistle when, from the point of Horner Hill, he should be viewed stealing down to have a quiet soil just below East Water Foot. But the scent is good; the rain of the last two nights has done good service. While the whistle is still shrilling away up above, he hears, what he dreads far more, a whimpering, eager note up yonder in the coppice that he only left a few minutes since. Now, indeed, wild alarm courses through his every nerve; he thought he had left that unpleasant affair in Hole Wood two miles behind. "Surely," he thinks, "'tis bad enough

to be harried out of my lair in the middle of the day, and have to scuttle off all this distance without the wretches trying to hunt me—me, of all deer, with all my age and experience and my great big horns. I must trot up the East Water a bit, I suppose, and run a few doubles and lie down in a good thicket, and then I should hope it will be all right, and those horrible hounds will go about their business!"

So off he goes up the East Water combe, as it does not seem good for his health to stay in view of Sidney any longer, but as he passes from the foot of Hollowcombe to Allercombe, he finds to his dismay that he is viewed again by a whole crowd of foot people on the ferny side of Cloutsham Ball. Hurrying on past Allercombe, he glides along through the tall trees in Sweetery. Meanwhile, Anthony has regained the farm, and is in consultation with the master, and in a few moments the welcome order to take out the pack has been given, and the field is crowding four abreast down the steep roadway into Sweetery. A good many old staghunters ride quickly, however, out to the fields above the farm, for if the stag has gone up Bagley Combe, he may be away to the moor ere this, and it would never do to start a forest run on a half beaten horse. There is to be no such good luck as this, however, for hounds soon fresh find him amongst the

ferns in Sweetery, and he doubles short back into Allercombe. Now all hopes of a forest run are over and done with. It will be Cutcombe or Horner, or, at best, the sea in Porlock Bay. See, yonder he goes over those green swamps at the head of Hollowcombe; how his head spreads and branches! and how grey the dying velvet looks in the sunlight! Now he bounds over the road and goes striding away round the shoulder of the hill, as if for Huntscott or Annicombe. Now let us get up to the road and give our horses a moment's breathing space, for the hounds will be here in a few minutes, and we may have to cross the graveyard at best speed. Here come the first ten couple; now give them room and come along. Mind that blind watercourse; hold him up over that clitter of stones; don't ride across in front of each other, pretty ladies, if you can help it. Now the hounds fling downwards; that's Lucombe Allers there below. Look at those two sheep-dogs coursing the stag down there by Holt Ball. Poor beast! he is pressed hard enough as it is. Now he flies for Wytchanger, and gains the shelter of the Lucombe Plantations, but with one hound pressing after him. In the old roadway Mr. Chorley views him, and Michael is stopped till the pack come up, and then it's "foward on" again, through the acres and acres of tall Scotch

fir, till the water is reached under Parsonage Side. Here the leading hounds come up with him, and ten minutes later he is safely taken at West Lucombe. Time, just an hour after the lay-on.

Suitable as is such a chase for an opening day, the one that follows is a far different affair, and is one of the performances that go to build up staghunting history. To ride in sight of the leading hounds from Sherracombe to Badgworthy is to enjoy a sensation which memory will always recall, and is enough to convert the veriest tyro into a lifelong staghunter.

It was four or five seasons since a galloping stag left the coverts below the Poltimore Arms behind him, and climbed Sherracombe, to gain the heights of Whitefield Down on his way to the North Forest and the mill wheel of Horner. But on Saturday, September 2nd, 1895, all went merry as a marriage bell. The harbouring had been laborious, but was done to perfection; the tufting was short and decisive, and by one o'clock a real forest king had taken his last drink in the tiny tributary of the Hole Water, which trickles down Sherracombe, and was away to the open, unblanched. Popham Wood, down the Hole Valley, had the honour of providing this gallant stag for the day's chase, and a staunch one he proved to be. The tufters soon drove him from Molland Wood to Berar,

while a veritable chorus of view halloas rang out from all the hilltops around as he was viewed at first one point and then another. The master stopped the tufters in one of Mr. Thorne's fields and sent Anthony for the pack at their temporary kennel at Higher Hole, and shortly before one o'clock they were laid on the foil, and the run of the season had commenced.

Now, come with me, my readers. Let us trot quietly up this nice cool shady path that runs up the combe beneath the wood. 'Tis moist and springy here; the dew still lies thickly in the shade; we have a gentle ascent to Whitefield. Down this way; this is better than joining the madding crowd that ere now is pounding along up the Queen's highway by the Poltimore Arms and all round to Five Barrows Cross, and so back to the head of the Down. Here come the hounds just above us on the right in the wood, and here's a good sportsman and deer preserver from the Bray Valley who has just seen the stag pass along. Now pull your horse into a trot; we must get away well with them, or they will beat us on the ascent. Now here's the water; let's watch them for a moment. Ah! that's it, Michael, he soiled there, did he? Here the waters part, but Michael never falters; up Sherracombe he goes, splashing from pool to pool. Rallywood comes third, and the leading two couples draw

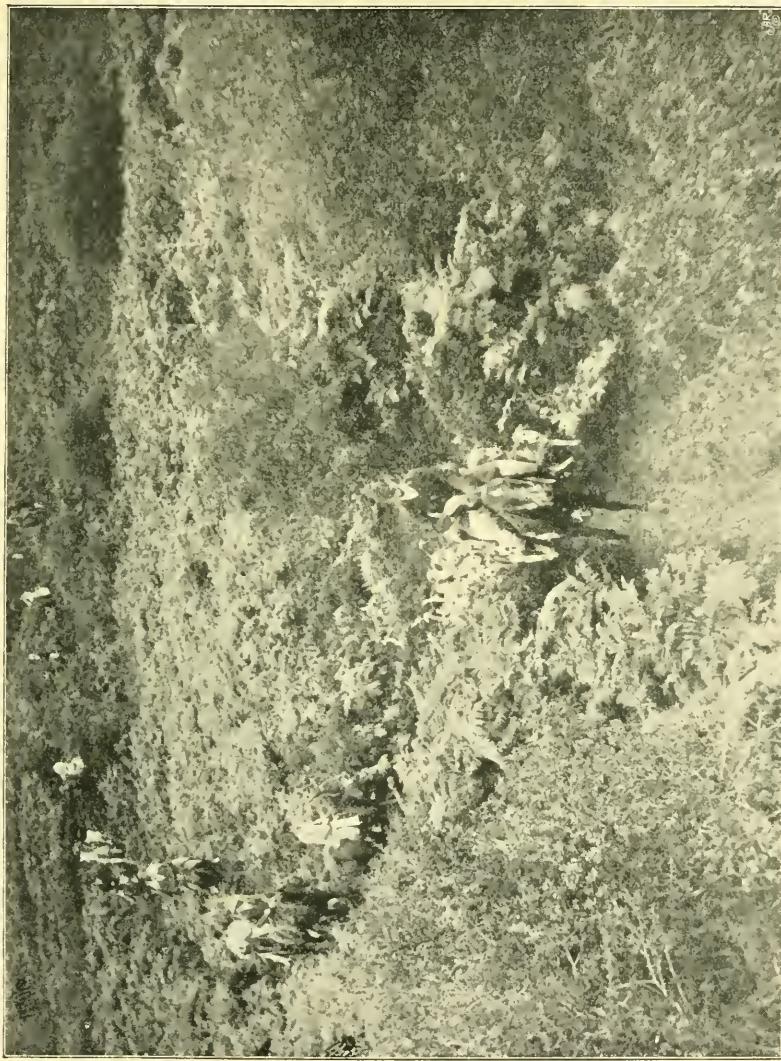
away from the rest as we climb through the ferns in the hot sunshine. Over yonder on the right, in that lane, there's a surging crowd of bobbing heads; one scarlet coat goes down already; 'tis the master, but he seems none the worse, and comes on again gaily. Now to stop Michael and let the rest come up and start fair. Here on the top there's a delightfully cool east wind. Horses are sobbing and lathering already, but they will have just time to catch their wind.

"How long has the stag gone, farmer?" "Just about a quarter of an hour, sir." "Hoick, hoick," says Anthony, and away they go, then falter for a minute, and again swing forward toward Ducky Pool. Now sit down in your saddle, my friend; catch him tight by the head, and come along; they are off like the wind, and 'tis a far cry to your second horse at Brendon Two Gates. How dry the moor is, to be sure! It is nearly the end of September, and yet one can gallop over the worst of it. Still a re-distribution of seats has begun already; the drainage gutters are taking their toll of the daisy clippers and star-gazers and the tied shoulders. Here we go down over the long slope of Vintcombe to the ancient fording of the Barle. Time to this water, twelve minutes from the Down. Dr. Bond's horse essays to soil with him, as it once did before in the Haddeo Water with woeful effect, but now whip and spur and objurgations

bring him to his feet again, and on we go. There's the master with a large following bearing off to the right for the Driver fields, and there are the hounds on the left racing up Goat Hill, with their heads pointing for Pinkery. Let us go on with them, for fear the stag should be soiling in the pond, and should betake himself to Woolhanger or Parracombe. Here they come across though, heading straight for Chains Barrow ; now the right contingent will be saved. Over into Long Chains Combe they go, stringing out already by sheer speed; now down the combe and into Hoar Oak, now up again and into Farley. Up once more at a slant amongst the sound heather of Brendon Common towards Dry Bridges. Patter across the Lynton Road, the only firm ground since the road at the ford by Driver. There must have been several falls behind us by this time ; Sir William Karslake, Miss Batt, Mr. Leney, Mr. de Las Casas, Mr. S. N. Quicke, and several others show signs of having bitten the peaty mud ; telescoped hats and dirty backs are the order of the day, for the pace is a cracker, and the great hounds keep sailing on as if they never meant to stop, with no semblance of check or turn.

Away they go towards Lankcombe ; 'tis sounder going now, down this long two-mile slope of heather, and we must be down at the Badgworthy Water yonder as soon as the hounds,

or they will give us the slip amongst fresh deer in the Deer-park. Now splash into the cool Badgworthy stream ; let him bury his muzzle deep in this cool, clear pool ; he'll go all the better. Hark at those angry, eager notes just above in the larch ; that's the line, depend on it ! Now we must climb this sloping path ; hark to Sidney, whistling above there ! He has galloped straight in from Two Gates, and, no doubt, has viewed our stag. He waves Anthony towards the larches high up in Landcombe ; two big male deer come bounding out, but Anthony will have none of them. In his haste one of them crosses his legs and turns clean over. Then comes the prettiest sight we have seen this season ; the hunted stag forced from his shelter by the hounds, comes bounding out from the same place as if to follow the other two. But Anthony is too many for him ; he knows him at once, and with a cheer has every hound on his line. One of them essays to cut him off, but the great antlers are quickly lowered, and the hound rolls over yelping in the heath. With staggering gait the beaten stag now lurches across the plain into Woodcock Combe and again sinks into the larches. There's a moment of suspense as hounds bustle down amongst the fir stems ; then Lord Ebrington views him as he steals away up the bottom, and a moment later the master's horn rings out



LORD EBRINGTON BRINGS OUT THE PACK TO LAY ON.

loud and long. He struggles gamely up the Badgworthy Water for a few minutes, and then turns savagely to bay, but Mr. Hamilton quickly seizes him by the off antler and all is soon over.

Time, just sixty minutes from the top of Whitefield Down. The seventeenth stag of the season. The scene of the take was exactly that of the famous picture which adorns the dining room of Bagborough House, and was about a hundred yards above the spot where His Majesty the King, when Prince of Wales, despatched his first Exmoor stag. The deer carried brows and trays, with very short offers for bays, and two long tines upon either top, and was a fine heavy stag. Hounds were so blown when the stag stood up that the bay was little more than a series of yelps, a sure testimony to the pace of the run, and had it not been for the cool easterly breeze blowing against horses, there would have been many a tale of woe before the finish. As it was, there were fully three-quarters of the field beside the water before the deer was dead.

On Saturday, September 19th, 1896, the Brayford coverts afforded a galloping deer and a run of the good old-fashioned sort, which, though somewhat slow, perhaps showed the staghounds at their best, and obtained from one and all the verdict of "a real good day." Not for some years have we seen a deer run over

the southern portion of Exmoor, the last one that did so, I think, being killed at Twitchen some years ago. In Collyns' "Chase of the Wild Red Deer" we are told that if a stag makes Fyldon Ridge from Whitefield he will go to Sheardon Hutch and Landacre and so down the Barle, and this in effect was somewhat the line of our deer of Saturday, the 19th.

I think, however, that being only a two-year-old male deer, he soon found himself out of his country, and was more occupied in going down wind and putting good distance between himself and the ringing notes of Anthony's horn than in making any particular point. With young deer, I have often noticed there is a tendency to go down wind when hard pressed, though of course a warrantable stag will always make his point, no matter though he be forced to run against a driving gale. Noon had passed ere Anthony had roused the best deer which Fred Goss could harbour in the Gratton coverts, and a small one he was at that.

However, young deer ere this have shown good runs from Bray, Mr. Basset's three-year-old to wit, which ran from Sherracombe to Horner mill wheel. At first, he looked like making Leworthy Bridge and Mole's Chamber, but he doubled short in covert and turned down towards Brayford.

'Twas on the Saturday after Barnstaple Fair, just two years ago, that a never-to-be-forgotten stag took the same turn and led us to Castle Hill and Umberleigh, on the river Taw, whereby some of the field lay out that night and did not get home till morning. Now, however, in spite of foot people in every field, this game little deer headed up the green pastures under Lydecott, and made for the Hole Water, and the chase began.

The master brought the pack from Gratton, where Mr. Robins had provided snug quarters, and laid them on where the deer left covert. Leaving Molland Wood well to their right, hounds hunted merrily up the long wooded combe which leads to the Poltimore Arms at Yard Down, but checked at the foot of Sherracombe, where the streams divide. Anthony was casting up Sherracombe when Sidney Tucker galloped up to him with the news that a few hounds were driving from Colent Wood toward the Yard Down Road. Now a convenient lane soon brought Anthony to the spot where a countryman had just seen a deer in the road, but while Anthony was enquiring of him, hounds took a line in the field beyond, and made off at score to Lyddicombe Bottom. Just beyond, a flock of sheep made a timely check, which enabled us to get to them by way of Fyldon Lane, here Anthony hit it again and

hunted up to Fyldon Common. Here we were assured by two second horsemen that for the last half hour, at least, no deer had passed that way, but the hounds thought otherwise, and soon brought us to the wire-topped county wall on Fyldon Ridge.

Apparently the deer had tried to jump this, but had failed, and then hounds made off at an improving pace down the whole length of the grassy common, and so to Long Holcombe as soon as the wire came to an end. Here again the pace was good as we scampered for half-a-mile over the yielding yellow moor-grass, hopping over the innumerable drainage gutters which emptied a saddle or two. Sinking to the Sheardon Water just below Wintershead Farm, hounds checked in the brown stream, but soon cast themselves downwards, and for a mile gave little indication that they were still on the foil; still there was sign enough to catch the huntsman's eye, and he held forward at a trot, until hounds hit it again where the deer had left the water. Another half-mile of grass and then they brought it down again to the Sheardon stream and checked for about ten minutes. Scent seemed to fail just now, but Lord Ebrington slotted the deer through a gateway leading to Sheardon Farm, and hounds were soon hunting steadily over the long grassy slopes of Sheardon to Ferny Ball. Just above Sheardon Hutch

they re-crossed the water and streamed over Withypool Common to the Barle above Landacre. Now here is an exceeding steep descent, down which one perforce must go, for the great hounds were plunging eagerly through the broad brown stream of the Barle below, as if to cross and take it up on the yonder bank. Leading down with whip-thong through the reins, horses slid down to the swampy green marsh beneath at a rate which pulled their owners headlong on hands and knees. It was excellent soft falling, however, and the field were soon fording the Barle and climbing the slopes of Landacre Common as if for Newland. Thundering along now on the sound heather of the table-land above, the hundreds of prancing hoofs struck the firm surface of the moor with a very different sound to that of the soft swishing moor-grass just left. Bending to the right, hounds entered the Blacklands Fields, and in a short mile fresh found their deer. As we scampered down Kitridge Lane approaching Withypool we could hear Sidney's shrill *view halloo* as the deer jumped in Woolpitts Copse and raced back up the Blacklands Fields and so made for the Barle above Brightworthy.

The lane to Landacre seemed our shortest way, and as we clattered down it we could view the deer racing over Withypool Common as if to regain Sheardon Hutch. Hounds faltered for

a moment at the Barle, but soon came on again, and were plainly running for blood. We had to scamper now at a far better pace to live with them as they splashed through the Barle and streamed up the Picked Stones Fields to the White Water at Cow Castle, and so past the ruined cottages made famous by Warden Page, and so on up stream. Up and up, onwards and onwards, with never a check or a doubt, the great hounds pressed steadily on the hot foil of their sinking quarry, and the end drew near. From Ash Plantation the rooks fluttered out at the unwonted sound, and a moment later they may well have been scared as the hunted deer rose from his last soiling place in the White Water stream and went on up the marshy bottom as if for Cloven Rocks amid a chorus of view halloas.

But now his course was run, hounds rapidly overhauled him, and in the home pasture of Winstitchen Farm they fairly bowled him over in the open after three hours and a quarter of steady hunting, of which the last three-quarters of an hour had been the fastest part.

Throughout the run hounds were only lifted once, and there were only two checks, except on first coming to the Sheardon Water, when the deer had travelled the stream bed for a long distance. Time from the lay on to the take, three hours and a quarter; twelve miles from

the lay on to the fresh find, and six to the take at Winstitchen—eighteen miles in all as hounds ran.

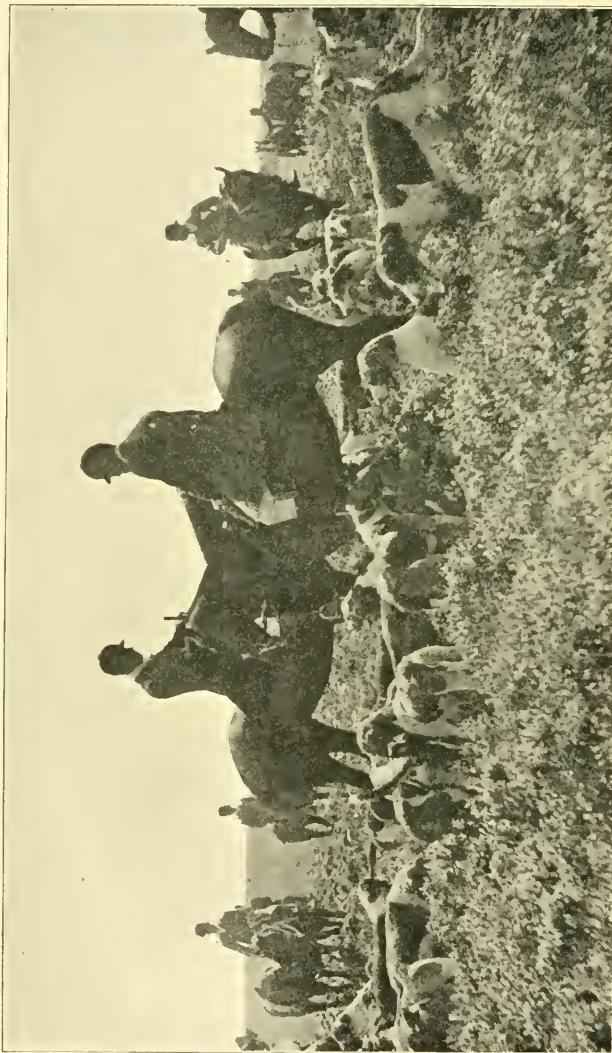
The eighth deer of the season, and by far the best run up to date. There were several empty saddles, but no particular grief. Two or three horses were ridden to a standstill, but soon recovered.

While one-horned deer are by no means uncommon on Exmoor, "nott" or hornless deer only rarely occur and arouse much interest and no little emulation when the chase which is to secure one of them is fairly in progress. The theory that their hornless condition is due to injury of some part other than the head may I think be dismissed as not borne out by investigation.

The great nott stag which has roamed the moor for so many years came to a glorious end on Wednesday, September 23rd, 1896, and showed such sport as will be long remembered. The harbouring was somewhat doubtful, but the master was informed when he arrived at the meet that a warrantable stag with one or two others had been seen at feed in the early morning in Sweeteray.

While Anthony was at work with his tufters four deer were viewed by Mr. Alfred Glass stealing quietly into Allercombe, which had already been drawn blank except for the

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THE MASTER AND ANTHONY ON STORE RIDGE.

presence of a one-horned four-year-old stag. On looking closely at these they were seen to be the well-known *nott* stag, the stag that was lost on Dunkery after the last Wheddon Cross meet, and two three-year-old male deer. Whistle and handkerchief soon brought Anthony to the spot, and then, with tufters hard at them, the four deer hurried up Sweetery towards Bagley, one turning back on the way. Ten minutes later the master was galloping into Cloutsham for the pack, and we were off and away up the Exford road, with every prospect of a rattling run. When Stoke Ridge was reached there was still a little tufting left to do, for the great *nott* stag and another were hanging amongst the patches of fir plantation in Bagley Combe.

Here, for once in a way, the field could see the whole thing; dashing into the firs, hounds drove out first as a matter of course the wrong deer, which doubled back over Dunkery, but the *nott* stag showed for a minute. Stopping hounds in a trice, Anthony soon had them settled on him, and he broke covert now in grand style for Langcombe Head. Giving him a few moments' law, the master now cheered them on again, and we set our horses' heads for the moor and fairly raced beside them down to Nutscale. Up now to Lucott Moor and away to the Colley Water and down the Weir. Down stream it was, and onwards down. Three fresh

deer crossed the foil, but no matter, Anthony held forward at a canter. Under Lilleycombe he hit the line, and then we knew that hounds must be gaining on their deer. 'Twas but thirty-two minutes from Bagley Combe to the Weir Water, and another twenty-five minutes driving at full speed forced this game old stag by Lillycombe and North Common and from Hollacombe Wood to Oare and Oare Common, and to bay in the Badgworthy Water at Cloud. Beating the water down to Malmsmead Bridge, he made a tough fight of it ere he was taken at last at two o'clock. He proved to be an extremely heavy stag with two bony knobs beneath the skin where his horns should have been.

The second day of the season of 1898 proved to be a lucky one. Only the year before, the first Hawkcombe Head meet produced a great moorland run, and now again on the same occasion in the following year have those who were out no reason indeed to complain. This run too, took place in spite of a most unfavourable day, for the strong, hot southerly wind soon swept away scent once the damp moorland surface was left behind, and hounds, horses, and men all suffered alike from the heat and dust. To add to this the stag that was before hounds was a very stout five or six-year-old deer of the old forest sort, game

to gallop and stay over many a weary mile, bold and straight-necked to a degree, not over-fat or heavy.

It was a bumper meet at Hawkcombe Head, Lynton, Porlock and Minehead making it their opening day, the first meet of that season having been held at Haddon instead of Cloutsham, on account of the demise of Sir Thomas Acland, which had occurred only shortly before, and the distances between the two extreme sides of the country proving almost impossible.

Tufting was begun without delay, and Metcombe was soon covered with foot people to watch operations. The sandy dust in the road between Culbone and Hawkcombe Head will not soon be forgotten, so blinding and thick did it rise, especially when the pack was brought from kennel to the lay on. While the long string of vehicles filed in close order along the road, the mounted field mostly betook themselves to the hunting rides on Culbone Hill or jogged along through the heath on the Metcombe side, but broken glass and rusty coils of broken fence wire made the latter course very unsafe. It may, perhaps, not be out of place to repeat here the well-worn caution to visitors to the wild West Country, as to the cruelty of throwing broken glass and bottles away in the heather or in the moorland or woodland streams. Whether they are riding on a coach top, or enjoying a

picnic lunch at a meet of the Staghounds, to throw away an empty bottle or shattered tumbler, even in what appears the least frequented spot, is laying a most dangerous snare for the gallant hounds and horses that are sure to sweep in haste over the spot sooner or later. Glass will remain for years with its cruel edge still keen in the bed of the river or brook down which the great hounds will presently come, pressing close to their sinking quarry, or will lie like a venomous snake amongst the heather and the grass ready to stab at the prancing hoof or cut deep through muscle and tendon and artery, giving the smooth open wound which takes so long to heal.

On Beggar's Knap, hard by the firs of Lillycombe Plantation, there lay three stags, sunning themselves as they stretched at ease on the short smooth heath, while four more stood amongst the pines just within the covert boundary, turning their heads uneasily to gaze at the gathering crowd of foot people on Metcombe Hill, at the line of carriages and cloud of dust on the Lynton road, at the spot of scarlet and grey over opposite upon Mill Hill.

While they gazed and wondered, there suddenly approached them up the wind their mortal foes, the tufters, brought cunningly to close quarters by Anthony. Now there is a rush and a commotion amongst the firs, the

little horned sheep scamper away over the knap, stampeding from the hue and cry. Two or three moments of uncertainty pass as hounds and deer dive into the thicket and for a while are lost to view; then the cry goes round like wildfire, "See, there they go," and sure enough one can espy a little herd of horned deer stealing down quickly over an open spot between the firs on their way to Hookway and Weirwood. Soon the first tufter comes and then another and another—four couple and a-half in all.

Now glasses are levelled on Weirwood Common, where the deer are just rising into view on the dark purple plain of heath, beyond the stunted scrub of Weirwood, and the leading deer is seen to have a good spread of beam as he pilots the rest in hasty flight over the undulating plain. Sidney is on the move too, cantering along on Mill Hill to cross the Weir Water and come up on Porlock Allotment level with the retreating deer. Swing your field glasses now on yonder brow where the Green Path dips to the Colley Water; see how the tall red deer are extended as Sidney comes alongside. Now they sink the dip, and Acmead lies in such a haze beyond that one can hardly see the white tufters even in the sunlight glare. Here comes Anthony bustling up the road on his black tufting pony, with an occasional twang

on his mellow horn to clear the way. Soon he sees the fluttering signal yonder on Acmead, and flies back for his pack, and one realises that there will be a gallop shortly of no mean order.

'Tis 12-20 as the kennel doors fly open and the next few moments are a purgatory of dust and heat, as the cavalcade pounds up the sandy road to Hawkcombe Head; but once out on the Green Path 'tis not so bad, and as we dip to the Weir Water we plainly see the master and Sidney awaiting us with the stopped tufters. There we hear that the two best stags have been cut out and have leapt the old two-wire fence into Kittucks. Through the narrow hunting gate we file with what patience we may, and with the same, hounds stoop to the foil and are off with a scream and a whimper at 12.35. All across the green mossy expanse of Kittucks they go, racing for place, almost mute in their headlong eagerness. The field scatters in a moment. Some ford the water at Three Coombes Foot, some struggle across the green plain, some make a detour by Larkbarrow. The deer have declined the new three-wire sheep fence into Manor Allotment, and hounds now lead us past Tom's Hill and away to the North Forest. Now, harden your hearts, my masters, and come along! Pinford bog is as hard to-day as it ever was yet, and if the

treacherous little gutters do not entrap you, and you have discernment enough not to ride right into some green puxy all will be well. But whichever way you take, do it at once, and give your horse time up the slope, for you will want every ounce of him now, and he is about to repay you for every oat he has eaten since last season. See now how hounds are turning, right away to the Warren, by St. Hubert! That gallant string of riders leathering up Trout Hill will shortly get behind. Look at all those fresh deer, too, how they career about—twos, threes and tens of them all over the great green expanse. That's the Warren Farm here on the left and that's the tiny stream of the Exe here below us. The hounds are crossing it. What will they do now? See, they are beginning to climb the steep side by Raven's Nest; we must get over somehow, but 'tis a parlous place. Have a care now, my friend; give him all the help you can, and, above all, 'ware bogs.

There goes Anthony up a rocky face where a goat might well hesitate; if hounds go on like this we shall be at Simonsbath or Winstitchen directly. Now we gain the top, and the breeze, hot though it is, strikes gratefully on heated face and heaving flanks. But see how hounds have turned! There they go left, all on the long plain to Exe Cleave, on and on, driving merrily

parallel with the course of the stream, but how high up. This is glorious galloping ground now that it is dry, and the easy descent favours horses just when they need it, for tails are quivering now, and the white foam is showing on neck and thigh. Here come the leading hounds right across our front, and into the Exford Road half-a-mile short of White Cross ; time, from the first whimper on Kittucks, forty fair minutes. On they drive down the fields to Newlands, and on again to the Pennycombe Water, where we come suddenly upon Mr. Hayes, of Pitsworthy, who has divided the two deer only a few minutes ago, and now shows Anthony which way the bigger one went. On down the combe to Chibbet Ford the big hounds carry it forthwith, but already they are getting distressed with the pace and the heat, which in this narrow valley indeed is intense. Through the fields for half-a-mile upwards they go to the White Cross Road just above Chibbet Post, and throw up in the road, whereby the stag gains much time, but Mr. Morland Greig presently spies him stealing away towards Mill Lane, and Anthony takes hounds at a sharp trot to the foil. Half-an-hour's law, however, on a day like this means much in the matter of scent, but hounds try hard for him, and carry the line right prettily up over the fields to Hoar Moor and on to Dunkery. Now, on the

stones and sun-baked heath, they have harder work, and we must be careful not to press them.

Presently they check, but the stag has been viewed crossing the sky-line near the Beacon, and they presently own it on the old heather and head straight into Allercombe. Now watch them, good sirs, and you shall see a sight which shall be graven on your mind's eye for all your days. Through the fern and whortleberry they filter down in twos and threes right to the bottom of the goyle, where stands a leafy birch bush, and from there comes striding out the hunted stag, weary and stiff, but not beaten yet, for his spreading head is still carried proudly and high. Away into Hollowcombe he goes, with hounds straining after him down through the cool leafy depths, where the cry rings out fierce and loud, then up the red dusty roadway for a space to Webber's Post, and down once more to the fern and furze and fir trees on Wytchanger Ball and Luccombe Allers. Here he shakes them all, but is viewed stealing away amongst the thick furze just above Ford, and here, as soon as hounds can be got together, he is fresh found once more. Game still, he gallops to and fro, and would beat hounds even now were it not for the huntsman's aid, who at every turn and twist still holds them forward. Never were hounds more weary than now, what

with the sun's rays from above, reflected from the parched stones beneath, the short spiky furze, and the strain of a four hours' hunt. Still they toiled onward to where their stag awaited them amid the tall fern in a tiny combe-head, whence he made a final rush to the foot of Luccombe Allers, and was immediately taken at 4.30. Distance, nearly twenty miles. Two long tines on either top and all his rights.



CROYDON HILL.



CHAPTER VII.

THE RUN OF HALF A CENTURY—FROM HAWKRIDGE TO
GLENTHORNE—A STAG'S SOLILOQUY—THE OPENING
DAY OF 1900—BRENDON HILL AND ELWORTHY.



THE Hawkridge stags are gentlemen and the Hawkridge men can ride, but never surely was there bluer blooded stag than that of Thursday, September 14th, 1899, and surely never did the

Hawkridge men have to ride so fast and far, or with such judgment as on this, the greatest run of recent years.

Why and wherefore there should suddenly be a maddening scent; why and wherefore a real forest king should happen on this particular day to leap from his lair, and lead a rejoicing field over the cream of Exmoor, right against a cool north wind, is idle to dispute; but so it was, and it will ever be that when a great run is expected it does not come off, and conversely

that when there is a small field out, and indifferent sport is expected, then the great run will come, and the over particular and the fair weather sportsman will not be there.

A field of about one hundred saw the beginning of this memorable run, and less than twenty saw the finish, for unless one got a flying start, and unless one took the right turn every time, there was little hope of making up lost ground, for even the best conditioned horses had all they could do to live with hounds through the first two hours, while they drove with eager cry across the limitless expanses of southern and northern Exmoor. This stag had a weakness for running the line of the forest streams, although keeping high above them for the most part on the grassy table-lands and fern covered slopes, but with one eye on the water all the way. So great was the pace that he never gained much distance on the hounds, and the field got many a view of him striding on before his fast coming foes, with head held high and neck set straight, in this his long wild gallop which never seemed to falter or to tire, and which led him on and on for mile after mile, avoiding steep ascents and leading straight from point to point with only two coverts touched, and those tiny ones between North Barton Wood and Cheriton.

Many veterans will call to mind a run in the

years gone by which ended at Wooda Bay with a late spring hind, and this stag might have gone there and some miles further on, but Lynton has grown since those times, and the beauties of the toy railway and the tall sky signs of *The Ladies' Field* and other interesting periodicals at the terminus doubtless had some effect in causing a short turn which took place in the run at Summerhouse Cliff, bringing the stag to Watersmeet and Desolation, and so on up the sea front cliffs. This season has been a dangerous one for hounds, and now again another was to pay the penalty by falling with the stag over the cliff at Glenthorne. Both were found dead together, killed instantly by the fall, and this great run came to a sudden end nearly four and a half hours after the lay on.

Those who saw this run through, and they were not many, will always remember how well the moor rode, and how straight the stag ran, how the cool wind whistled with grateful force on their heated cheeks, how the pack drove like a whirlwind up the length of North Barton Wood almost on the stag's back, how they started across Withypool Common in a close-packed striving line, six-abreast, that rose and fell over the undulating plains of heather, and how they got no help nor needed any at the few places where their galloping quarry splashed

through the moorland streams. At one point just short of Flexburrow the stag had a moment's thought of Hole Water and turned up a long ferny combe, but he knew far more country than one expected, and must have passed from Exe head to the Barle before, for although hard pressed, he still had time to choose his way, and did so with a will which would have saved him times over on any day when the scent was less burning or hounds less equal to their work.

Some fifteen stags of greater and less degree had worked their wicked will on a turnip field on Hawkridge Ridge on Wednesday night, so that Whiterocks was alive with deer when the tufters were thrown in, and a general scattering of the herd took place. Some headed one way and some another, but this gallant stag came round by Birch Cleave to Three Waters and hung about amongst the thickest of the fern as though loth to go. A great fern frond hung all across his antlers as with swift bounds he fled from the leading tufter past Three Waters. The master and Anthony conferred awhile, and then the former went for the kennelled pack to East Hollowcombe and brought them to the scene of action. Anthony trotted them quietly down to the foil just half an hour after the stag had passed, and at ten minutes past one the cry began which was only to end at Glen-

thorne. The chase was now begun; but the swift part of it was not yet awhile, the line had to be hunted through Row Down and South Barton, and there was a check at the water under the Rectory, whereby Anthony made it good against Ashway Side and then cast up the water beyond Torr Steps.

Then all of a sudden the wooded valley of the Barle rang out with music, and that of no uncertain sound, for the stag had dallied, and hounds were at him with a vengeance, so that the welkin rang again with their loud-mouthed challenge. In a trice he was away all up the long line of the West Water and away beyond, leaping gates and fences in his haste to gain the lonely firs of Lord's Plantation. Knee-deep in heather and grass and whortleberry, the foremost of the field went on in a hurrying string, guided by that eager cry which left no manner of doubt which way it was to be. Lush and green and yielding, the surface of old Barrow Down is poor galloping ground, but Withypool Common is better, and the further they went the better it still became.

With Porchester Post on the left and Knighton Combe still nearing, hounds streamed away in right gallant style, as if tied to him. Heads up and sterns down, ears laid back by the breeze, was the order of the day; nothing to stop or turn them, only the breast high

scent to draw them on, all racing for a place. Past Dalacombe and Landacre, and down to water under Sheardon Hutch. See! yonder he goes, up the Sheardon meadows. And with the same, hounds fling forward from the water, needing no help and waiting for none.

Away up the level hams, and away past Horsen ford, away over Great and Little Woolcombe, up the valley past Cow Castle, and past Flexburrow, over Halsecombe, hounds on the southern side of the Barle and the field on the northern, sound short turf under foot, and the cool breath of the north wind against one all the time. So great is the pace that the stag cannot keep long out of view. Simonsbath heaves in sight, and he still strides straight on by Mount Pleasant, with Halsecombe Plantation just below him, then drops over the South Molton road, and seeks an insecure shelter in Cornham Brake. Mute and panting, hounds enter the dark green fir covert. A few moments pass and then they fresh find him, push him out from the end nearest Cornham, whence he backs it over the meadows to the lower end, only to be again pushed out forthwith, and to fly over Bale Water and the Challacombe road and away up the sunlit fields between Duredown and Limecombe. Now comes the tug of war; horses have come so fast that the ascending slope, though gentle, begins to tell.

The great stretch of Duredown with its waving grass comes and passes, and from its crest one can take a moment's view of the way hounds are heading on Exe Plain.

They fling over the swampy springheads of the Exe and bend a little to the right. Down to the Lynton road goes all the field, except a lucky half dozen, Mr. Snow amongst them, who make straight for Cheriton Ridge. Hounds stream on past Blackpitts, and down the line of the Farley Water, and driving still straight against the breeze for four glorious miles, come at last to covert at Sanctuary Wood. The pace now slackens, and it is high time too. Half-a-mile over the fields above Bridge Ball brings them to the Combe Park Woods, which they drive straight through just above Mr. J. Budd's hunting box, crossing the Hoar Oak Water. It is a trying climb for horses to the upland fields of West Lynn, but once up on the top the breeze revives them again.

Down over the fields go the hounds straight to the summer-house, and one expects every moment to hear them bay the stag on the edge of this dizzy cliff which overhangs Lynmouth by nearly nine hundred feet. The point so far is almost sixteen miles from Whiterocks, and hounds have run so straight that they have only covered nineteen miles from Three Waters to do it, but now instead of coming on a dead-beat

stag, they still have another point of four miles and a-half to cover, and the mighty gorge of the Lyn to sink and rise, which the stag, as straight as the contour of the ground will let him, makes in five miles and a-half. This makes the two points of the run total up to twenty miles and a-half, and the distance covered amounts to twenty-four and a-half, which with some backward and forward turns at the finish might with safety be called twenty-five miles and be well under the mark. Hounds drive him unaided round the giddy heights of Lyn Cleave and Myrtleberry to Barton Wood, and he is viewed climbing Countisbury Common by Ducombe Wells with quarter of an hour's start. Anthony lays on afresh, Mr. R. H. Fry driving past at the moment, and hounds stream away as if they had only just begun. Down by Desolate they go, and so straight along a green path on the cliff which brings them to Glenthorne. Here they race him to and fro; he tries the back door of the house, and presently with a rush goes right over the cliff, to be picked up stone dead on the beach below, and the two-year-old Guardsman with him.

On September 14th, 1849, a stag was hunted from Hawkridge to Glenthorne and there taken and saved, a curious coincidence of date. The only run of recent years which can at all compare with this is that from Leeworthy Post

to Lucombe which befell in Mr. Basset's mastership.

The stag was a fairly heavy one, with two short points atop on either side and brows and trays.

A king of the forest lay in his downy couch among the tiny firs that line the sides of the little combe that faces the romantic Doone Valley, on the dull grey morn of Wednesday, Oct. 11th, 1899, and thus he soliloquised to himself: "I wonder what George Barwick is doing, sneaking about looking at me over the fence! I suppose he thinks I don't see him, but I do, and if I were anywhere else but here I suppose I should have to make a move. He's always out looking about when he might just as well be at home getting his breakfast, and so is John Lang over at Cloutsham, and Keeper Wensley at Langham, and that other chap, Goss—he doesn't seem to me to belong to these parts altogether by the smell of him. However, I suppose it is all right, but one can't be too careful at this time of the year, when everything smells so plain, and there seem to me to be hounds about most days of the week. What a good job it was I lay so close the other day in Horner Wood when Anthony came by; if I'd once moved I believe he would have been after me, and I can't run a bit, though I believe I could fight if the worst came to the worst. I should

not care for a few hounds or even half a dozen, especially if I could find a good deep pool, but the bother of it must be when they get all round you and you can't run any more; then I don't know what I should do, but I'd take good care they didn't touch me! How good those acorns were last night down in Badgworthy Wood! It's a pity there weren't any more of them though; they take so long to find, and the hinds—bless 'em—are ever so much cleverer than I am, picking them out amongst the leaves. I wonder how that light-coloured stag is that I had such a round with after my morning bath as I came up from the water through Woodcombe Combe. He went away mighty stiff, I thought, after that last dig in the ribs I gave him. It's an awful bother having to drive away all these young stags who seem to fancy that the whole place belongs to them, but it doesn't, it's mine, and I'll let them know it too, as soon as the moon sets to-night! My throat's rather sore though from singing so much, but I do like to hear the sounds go all down from combe to combe; and don't the hinds like to hear it too. They know a good voice when they hear it. There's that pretty little hind, with the red jacket and long neck over in Clannacombe; she really understands me, and I think would follow me anywhere—but what's that moving over there? Oh, I see! it's only



ON THE MOOR NEAR WHITSTONES. G. BARWICK AND J. P. GODDARD.

shepherd Armstrong, going out with his dog to look at those ewes on the Lees. I needn't mind him; he's a quiet peaceable sort of chap enough, so I'll just stretch myself and have a look round and then settle down for the day. I wonder whether George Barwick's there still, or whether he's gone off at last. No, I don't see him. It looks all right for a pretty peaceful day, and there's not too much sun. I may be able to get a few hours' sleep——What's that? I thought I heard something. Yes, I certainly heard horses; and what's that horrible smell? There must be hounds about; Anthony thought he would catch me napping, did he? Not much at my time of life! But I was a fool to go sleep in such a little place.

Just look! What a lot of them, all the way back to the top gate. Who's that yelling? That's not Anthony! Why it must be the master himself, and there is Lord Ebrington, as I'm a living stag. Great turnip tops! I must be off! Here goes for a move and a speedy one! Now, it's all very well to rush at me like that, but you might just as well try to catch a swallow on the wing as me when I feel disposed for a gallop! Here are the other deer, now I'll duck down in the ferns, and I'll bet they'll go right by. That's it! Just look at them, going like mazed things. Now if I bide quietly here in Woodcock

Combe the hounds can run after them as much as they like, and I daresay it will be all right. How the horses pound along! It must be jolly hard work carrying great fat men on their backs like they do. I wonder they put up with it. I should like to see any man touch me! I could throw him yards and then spike him as well if I liked, but those horses don't seem to know any better; they are nearly as fat as the men. Hark! I hear them all down by Cloud. Now, they're coming back again, I must lie low, for 'twould never do to be found here now with all my herd scattered to the four winds. I shouldn't know where to look for a deer to help me, and really running makes me feel quite faint the last season or two. Who is that yelling now? That's Christopher Birmingham, unless I've forgotten his voice. That three atop stag I gave such a thrashing to is coming back, no doubt. I hope he won't bring those beastly hounds up to me. I think I'll slip off into Landcombe: there's more shelter there, and I might presently get a chance to draw away altogether out of this noisy place, for there seem to be people everywhere to-day and I shan't get a wink after all this fuss. Hark! how they talk and laugh! I can't see what they can find to laugh about. I don't see anything funny in such a row on a nice quiet day. And just listen to those hounds too! I

wonder if they've struck my line. I'd better be off on the quiet while I can ; they seem to be all over the place. Here goes for Horner, but I shall take it easy, for it's such a plaguey long way, and I don't care for much galloping in the middle of the day. Oh ! bother it all here they come ! Here's his lordship blowing and blowing as if he never saw a stag before. I wish he'd let me alone ! I shall go quicker and get right away as fast as ever I can. Where's that easy rack in the fence ? It's never just where you want it. This one will have to do, I suppose ; now I'll show them a clean pair of heels, and they can hunt about in the Deer-park all day if they please. This is better now, down hill and a bit of a breeze to meet one. Here's the Chalk Water ; I'll have one good souse and on again. That was good and makes one feel better. I think the easiest way will be by Hoscombe, for I don't want to go on climbing any more hills if I can help it. I wonder if there are any deer on Acmead. No, I don't see a horn or an ear, and with the scent like it is I could twig 'em half-a-mile off going against the wind like this. No, not one ! I must keep going, for you never know what men will be up to in the middle of the day. Let's look back. Ho ! here they come after me then to the middle of Stowey allotments. There they all stand in a great flock and there are some hounds standing with them.

What are they up to, I wonder? I don't know at all that things look healthy, I shall go on. Oh bother 'em! they're all coming now, and there is a whole pack of hounds! This won't do at all. I must go right on to Nutscale as quickly as I can, as it's confoundedly hot and my winter coat is nearly half grown too. Here's the Porlock road; now it is all down hill and I can go a bit faster. Surely I shall wind some other deer in Nutscale Brake. No, there don't seem to be any. Shall I stop and have a try round? I don't suppose it would do, they might be coming on, for if I can smell so well perhaps they can too. Here's the water! This is delicious, I should like to roll in it for half-an-hour, but I won't, I'll be off again. Here's a sloping path. I'll run up that, it is easier travelling than over the heather and stones. Here's Wilmersham Wood. I'll just slip down through the trees and cross the water and get up the other side of Ley Hill, and then I can look back and see if it is all quiet. It is rather a grind getting up through the wood and my horns are so wide and so big that every twig seems to catch them. What a rate I've come to be sure! I'll just skip over the top and get down into Horner Wood, and then if they follow me as far as that I must run the woods and put up fresh deer, and it's sure to be all right. I know there are a lot of deer

there, because only last week I was here myself, and should have stayed till now, only I could not find anything decent to eat, and a fellow must have something tasty to keep up his strength. O! murder! Here they come again; I hear the hounds speaking at the water by Poole Bridge, and there's a horn in the bottom. How fast they come to be sure! Here goes for Yealscombe! Now down through the ferns, that will scatter them, see if it don't. Here's a beautiful sloping path. Who made all these paths, I wonder, just for fine fellows like me to run along when we feel disposed? I'll jog down here and slip round into a quiet place I know of in Halescombe, for I've got a horrid stitch in my side and I don't like going much further. There; it's nice and quiet here at any rate. I must stop and blow. Not a man about anywhere.

This is more like. Oh, you brute! have you found me already? I won't go a yard, but if you don't hold your noisy tongue, I'll pin you right to the ground. What! more coming! And there are men too! Dozens of them, and there is a whistle blowing. This is bad. What shall I do? I won't be caught! I'll go down and get in the water, and there will be no scent there, at any rate. How they yell! The woods are alive with men; every place seems thick with them, or hounds, or both. I can't even stop to drink. Here's a good tree. I'll

set my back to that, and then we'll see who dares. Oh, you great red villain, would you? I wish I had you down here in the water. Here's a chance; I'll pin that hound. There's one for him, anyway! I'll go up to the mill leat; perhaps I can shake them off there. No, this is worse than ever. Here comes Sidney running with a rope. What's that for, I wonder? Now down the meadow. If that brown sheep-dog does not get out of the way, I'll spike him. Here's a wall; can I clear it? Only just. Out of the way, you horses. If I'd time I'd teach you! Now down to the water again where 'tis deep and dark and shady. Oh, you hounds! Get out! If there weren't so many of you, I'd show you how to worry your betters. What's that on my horns? Oh, George Barwick, George Barwick! I wish I'd kept away from you in the morning."

Harbouring on the moor has, from the nature of the ground, to be done almost entirely by viewing the deer, and consequently requires great care and judgment, the small amount of covert rendering all deer, and especially the older stags, particularly liable to move their quarters at the least alarm. Thus a watch has often to be kept upon their movements until the tufters are actually brought to their lair, as even when settled in their bed for the day, some thoughtless passers-by may come between

the wind and their nobility, and the carefully arranged day's sport be entirely spoilt. Many a disappointment might be traced to neglect in watching the noble animal until the actual moment when he is wanted.

On August 8th, 1900, the meeting field saw more than usual of the alarms and excursions of the chase, for first of all a procession of huntsman, harbourer and master, and four and a-half couples of tufters moved slowly, but as if on business bent, across the crowded field to begin tufting amid the fern and thorn bushes of the yonder part of the Ball itself, and then some fifteen minutes later, the master came cantering back with the welcome words "They've found" writ large all over him. Taking the direction of Stoke Ridge one watched him speeding towards the moor with the shrewd suspicion that if all went well, and the good stag roused below in the combe of East Water was only being driven straight by the bustling tufters, there must soon be a start in the best of all directions, that of the open moor, and so it proved. Many an elegant luncheon was nipped in the bud, many a flirtation was all too quickly interrupted—to be continued in our next, no doubt—by the twang, twang, twanging of the master's horn as he returned for the waiting pack, and gave the welcome word that the stag had gone right away to the moor and

that all was ready. With great consideration for the field, he returned to the trysting-place itself, and blew there several long-drawn blasts, summoning from the carriages all whom it might concern, and who wished to see if, this day, a stag must die.

Then from their kennel the great hounds came trooping out into the sunshine, and moved up the long stony lane which leads from Cloutsham to Exford, the usual crowding being much relieved by the major portion of the field having scampered away beforehand to view the stag breaking covert. High up on Lankcombe Head a dense line of horsemen was awaiting the advent of the eager pack, themselves all ready for the coming pursuit across the moor. Not hurrying his trusty pack, but at a steady pace suited to the tender age of the young entries and the time of year, the master brought his charges to Anthony, and the first run of the legitimate season began within a few minutes of half-past twelve.

Avoiding with care the line of two other stags that had broken covert much in the same direction, Anthony brought his hounds to the foil, and then, with a cool life-giving westerly breeze fanning cheek and muzzle and flank, horse and hound sprang forward over the grassy luxuriance of the billowy plains and combes which stretch around for miles upon miles from

horizon to horizon in apparently endless width. At first the ground was yielding as the great hounds swung down from corrie to glen in Embercombe, settling by degrees with more and more steadiness to the ample scent; down through the rushes and the fern and from one glancing sunlit pool to another, down past the overhanging brim and the stunted thorn bush at the bottom.

See, yonder goes the stag, and what a heavy one he is! He has waited so long in Chettiford Water that hounds will be close at him. Up the opposite slope with its mingled growth of grass and heather he springs, and labours in his stride, but his strength is all in him as yet, and he gains at every bound on the wide-spread array of his pursuers. If he heads for the Forest now there will be a run indeed, if he makes for Culbone there will be a nice run all the same, if he joins the herd there will be trouble, but a run perhaps, if his heart fail him and he sinks again to Horner, he will die but a less glorious death. See now he climbs the hill, and has disappeared over the skyline, his head is set for the great plain of Exmoor, and now there will be sport if he only descends the Weir Water, but with Black Mires before him he has an ample choice and no one to bar the way.

On Babe Hill two saddles are empty, Mr. Hugh Nickals disappears beneath his horse, but

the falling is soft and he is soon up and on again, and at Lucott Cross the great hounds swing to the left over Acmead and all is well. The yielding moor grass plashes beneath the tread of countless feet, the horned sheep scatter and scurry together in huddled flocks, as the chase sweeps out with fast increasing speed over the grassy expanse, the moor ponies snort and scamper with flying manes and tails as the cavalcade invades with breathless haste their quiet solitude, and the curlews wheel and whistle in alarm. Far from beating a cowardly retreat down the quiet combe of the Weir Water this gallant stag, though his years weigh heavy on him, and his head has many points, goes striding on over Black Barrow and leads the way down Hoscombe to Chalk Water. Then he takes a rather unexpected turn in climbing to Stowey Allotment, for hounds swing left-handed, and reaching Manor Allotment with best foot foremost, go streaming down to the little combe which leads to the deep gorge of the Badgworthy Water. This half-mile slope of easy, long descent they covered at a pace which brought out the quality or the reverse of many a panting steed that had already begun to feel the strain of fifty minutes at best pace over the cream of Exmoor.

On and on, down and down, with the dashing thin white line over a hundred yards ahead, in

and out between the stones and the fort-like kopjes at the bottom, and there lies the brown gleaming stream by the County Wall, and hounds go no further. Anthony casts up and round and down, but try how he will there is no line. Presently he goes back to Manor Allotment, and there in the combe down which hounds lately ran, is a herd of deer and the hunted stag amongst them. Now the chase begins afresh, and the question arises how to cut out the veteran from the younger deer. By Stowey Allotment they sink to the Chalk Water by way of Blindwell Combe. The fresh deer go on and climb Mill Hill in full view of the field, but from a brake of furze and fern a single hound pokes out the hunted stag, and the welkin rings again with the sound of horn and view-holloa. Through a strip of covert at the foot of the Chalk Water and away up to Hart Way, goes the gallant stag with limbs that stiffen already and with shortening stride. Up Stowey Ridge, finding a new wire fence, he leads the way and then descending Landcombe seeks the shelter of the larches overhanging Badgworthy.

Here are many fresh deer, but they avail him nothing. Once in the shelter of the larches he is fain to stop and rest, and that rest seals his fate. With the puppies at his heel Anthony arrives in time to view his great beamed frontlet appearing through the tangle of mossy

stems and lichenèd branches, and away he goes with hounds almost at his haunches up the line of Badgworthy and away by Hoccombe Water, hard pressed and making his last effort. With a short turn he comes back over Badgworthy Lees and up the Doone Valley, where a young male deer springs startled from the fern : then he backs it again over Brendon Common to the Hoccombe Water, as though he would gain Farley. He climbs Buscombe with staggering strides and comes down to Buscombe Water in evident distress ; a drainage grip entraps a horse that falls and lies apparently back broken—a dreary place in which to die. Regaining the Deerpark, the stag meets Sidney with five couple of hounds, which forthwith make the pace and put the final touch to the stag's troubles. Sinking to water he skirts the lower fringe of Badgworthy Wood, and the gorge rings again with the cries of the chase as the hounds close with their noble quarry. In Yealscombe he tries a double, but it is all no good—there is nothing left him but the water. On and on, down the valley the good hounds drive him from pool to shallow, from slippery rock to bubbling pool again, and then at Cloud Farm he can go no farther.

To and fro he doubles, and leaps fences in desperate effort to mount a rocky knoll, leaping the wire boundary to the river, and threatening

the angry hounds with his velvet antlers—all is no use, he takes to the deepest and widest pool and they have him. Another horse meets his fate in the last few moments of the run, breaking his fetlock in the path beside the water, a sad piece of ill fortune.

Mr. Froude Hancock seizes the stag by the near horn which, strange to say snaps off short at the top in his grasp.

As Anthony delivers with all speed the “coup de grace,” a herd of sixteen stags stands outlined in bold relief on the skyline of Oare Common, looking down at the fate of their leader. On the off top are four points and on the broken near top, three, the long brow betokening the goodly age of the stag, and his well filled haunch betraying the good pasturage and snug lying of his summer haunts.

In former times the deer no doubt crossed freely from the grassy ranges of the Brendon Hills to the opposing slopes of the Quantocks, before the enclosures of the fertile red vale of Crowcombe were rendered doubly impassable by the construction of the West Somerset railway. And their most favourite point of departure from the Brendons would naturally be at their quietest and most solitary point, where Elworthy Combe runs down towards the Hartrow and Willett coverts, and where the journey across the vale to the Crowcombe Woods is by no means a

long one. The romantic depths of Combe Sydenham, the thickets of Tilsey plantations and the fern brakes of Elworthy Combe, are still favoured by wandering units of the Haddon and Slowley herds and it was with one of these that the following chase occurred.

The run took place on Saturday, 15th September, 1900, with a galloping three-year-old deer from Parson's Close Plantation near Luxborough. Two deer had been slotted by the harbourer where they left their feeding ground adjoining the dense shelter of the plantation, one of these being presumably a warrantable deer, and the other turning out to be a galloper of the most fleet footed description. Although the time of year has come when a light bodied deer may be hunted with good prospect of sport, the ground is still so dry that it is not an undertaking to be entered upon without due cause. The covert, however, lying detached as it does, affords any deer found in it opportunity of choosing at least three lines of country over which the going is good, and wherein fresh deer are not over likely to be encountered. The tufters had not been at work many minutes when a male deer with brows, trays and uprights was roused and driven away, Woodman dashing at him with a speed which set him going to such a tune that it took three hours of steady hunting to come up with him. At first, of course, the

canons of staghunting were complied with by trying back for the heavier deer said to be harboured, but although Anthony spent much valuable time in covert on foot, the big deer was not forthcoming.

There being no alternative deer harboured, the pack was accordingly brought from Kingsbridge, and at ten minutes to one o'clock, a matter of fifty minutes after the deer had broken covert, hounds were let go on the fields adjoining Treborough Common. From one ferny dingle to another, from combe to combe, by rocky sheep paths and by swampy spring heads, hounds ran at a very considerable pace considering the advantage held by their quarry. Running round the contours of Trebborough Common they came up to the furze-strewn plain on top at last, and after various short checks on ground foiled by sheep, carried the line to the Raleigh's Cross road and the heathy commons on the Withiel side. While hounds were slowly hunting the line, the stag was viewed some distance ahead, sinking by Sminhayes Corner to the Comberow Woods that overhang Leigh Barton. Red Deer Land is full of steep hills and deep gorges, but none surely are deeper or steeper than the sides of the combes adjoining the mineral incline which falls from the highest point of the Brendon Hills to the fertile red valleys of Roadwater

and Washford. Down through the dense green shades of the oak woods hounds hunted slowly on, and perhaps it was as well that they did hunt slowly, for to ride to hounds amongst these precipices takes time and circumspection, and the staghounds are not so often in this particular neighbourhood that their followers are overlearned in its geography. For half an hour at a time hounds were left perforce entirely to themselves, but such old performers as Slow-boy, Woodman and Pilot could well be trusted to attend to the matter in hand. Picking out the line piece by piece, the pack forged steadily onward, traversing the steep incline of the mineral railway and passing on from woodland glade to ferny slope till they came to the commons at the head of Sticklepath Hill. Here there was another check, but Anthony's perseverance was not to be denied, and after some pretty hunting over the furze and a little slotting down a road, the pack swung away over a turnip field to the higher end of Colton Pits. Here in the larch plantations the deer might well have lingered, but the line was still cold and doubtful, and it was only by patient work that it was carried on over some wide commons and sterile fields to the head of Elworthy Combe.

Here, with the Quantock range facing the Brendons across the Crowcombe vale, with the

sea below and the vale of Taunton Deane stretching away to the south-east, there was just time to look round and think of the landscape while Anthony cast downwards amongst the fern and gorse. In the fold of Elworthy Combe under some stunted thorns a trickle of water had tempted the hunted deer, and Regal gave evidence in solemn tones to the still fresh scent. Lingering among the fern lower down, the deer now heard the dread approach of his pursuers, safely left behind, as he thought, nearly four hours ago, and many miles away. Springing up, he was quickly viewed, and began to gallop over Mr. Notley's domain of Combe Sydenham, apparently still strong and fresh. So much patient hunting, however, was not to be thrown away ; hounds were after him in a trice, and at a very different pace from that shown hitherto. With a cry that made the welkin ring again, hounds dashed through the tall trees, and swept down over the rabbit-burrowed slopes of Combe Sydenham, where an awkward descent awaited the field, with an angry wasp's nest in the most uncomfortable part. Then came a heart-breaking climb to the confines of Nettlecombe and another descent brought the field to the civilisation and the high farming of the valley beneath Sir Walter Trevelyan's ancestral home. In a stream, of which I do not know the name, running down from Nettlecombe Court to the village below,

the deer took a hurried bath, but found hounds too close to him for lingering, and sped away over the stiffly fenced enclosures towards Washford. Blind as they were, several banks had to be negotiated, and that without loss of time, for hounds were driving their sinking deer with heads up, sterns down, and hackles rising in a manner that meant business. Another mile from field to field brought them to the Williton road, where their deer had been viewed only a few short minutes ahead of them. On over the level tillage grounds until a short turn gave them pause for a few minutes near a small covert, called, I believe, Furze Close. Into this they presently carried the line, and there was a rousing fresh find. On before them speed the deer, still able to bound lightly over the banks and trim fences of the valley, but unable to maintain the pace for long. Swinging round in a ring to the corner of Furze Close, he came to a final standstill in a small hurdled enclosure in a disused lane. Here Mr. John Clatworthy, of Exton, jumped off his horse, and took him single-handed before the leading hounds could reach him. Time from the lay on four hours, and from the fresh find at Elworthy Barrows, one hour and five minutes, this latter part particularly fast and over a stiff and difficult country. He had brows, trays and uprights only.

THE LATE MR. JOSHUA CLARKE.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOLDNESS OF THE EXMOOR DEER—THEIR NOISELESS TREAD—THE TUFTING PONY—DUST—THE MADDING CROWD—THE COUNTISBURY CLIFFS—SUNSET ON THE SEA.



THE greater part of the field of course do their day's hunting on one horse, and long distances are covered in the course of the many hours which go to the full complement of a day's pursuit of the

wild stag. Horses are naturally by no means at their best when the herd is in its "pride of grease," as the ancient chroniclers have it, but still they contrive to carry heavy weights for a great many hours over much rough country, and are much sustained no doubt by the bracing nature of the air at the great heights above the sea where the deer are mostly to be found, and also by the springy nature of the foothold, which as long as it be firm enough, is of the very best possible description for

galloping over. Comparisons are often made between the amount of work a horse can do if he spends his life amongst the hills and combes of Exmoor, or if he has to carry his master to foxhounds in the Shires. In a flying country, or more certainly still in a big banking country, the perpetual landing is far more trying to forelegs and tendons than the galloping chases of Exmoor, and the constant effort of heaving himself and his rider into the air takes far more out of a willing hunter than the struggle up the narrow hillside paths and through the mire and swamps of the western wilderness. Though the hours are far longer and the distances galloped over much greater, horses certainly last longer, if only they receive fair treatment, than they do when ridden equally hard over a flatter country with the usual obstacles. For the hotter and more especially trying days of August old horses are far better mounts than young ones, and will take their turn with more certainty, while bringing their rider home with less weary footsteps than the five or six-year-old mounts, that in hind hunting will prove the better horses ; for it takes a fleeter and a fresher horse to catch a long necked hind than it does to follow the straight running line of a monarch of the moor.

When a stag has a point to make he will make it without fail, although he may be turned

aside for awhile by some unlooked for obstacle, while the wily hind will be for ever changing her course and doubling in each covert, to come out at some totally unexpected spot, while ever and anon she will lead her pursuers down to water and then shape her course straight upwards to the very summit of the highest hill she can find. Still it is always good judgment to keep above hounds while running on these enormous hillsides. It is still more necessary to do so when they have a hind before them, as her light limbs will carry her from the rocky pools to the wind swept summit where perhaps the rest of the herd are waiting for her, and then if your horse is blown with the long ascent you cannot possibly be in time to help single her out from her comrades, or to see in which direction she creeps away to rest herself while the pack is divided in all directions, each section with a fresh deer or two before them.

In making one's way to a meet in the short winter days when the appointed time is ten o'clock, one more often than not views a herd or two of deer standing about on the open, which one does not so often see in the autumn season, when the hinds are sheltering themselves and their calves in the thickest jungles they can find, and the stags seem instinctively to know that they are in season, and that the harbourer

is abroad. Whenever one encounters Exmoor deer one is struck by the difference which long centuries of training have made in their demeanour from that of their brethren north of the Border.

If deer in the Highlands get wind of a human being they at once become uneasy, but these noble animals take small account of mankind, whether mounted or on foot, and so long as one passes on and does not stop to gaze at them as they stand or lie with eyes fixed on your approach, they will hold their own even though you pass to windward of their lair, but if you should be accompanied by dog or a hound, no matter how small a one he be, they immediately become uneasy, they turn their heads to and fro, some old hind stamps a warning signal, or the oldest stag present prods his nearest neighbour with his antler, and then with a long jerking trot they glide across the heathy carpet to turn and swing round at a short distance, and then if the scrutiny does not please them to break into a lurching gallop which carries them in less time than it takes to tell, round the nearest shoulder of the rolling plain, and so away for awhile until quieter ground is reached. If you follow them as they go, it is pretty to see how timid and distrustful they are of each object in their path and how the leading hind will shy

and jerk to right or left at each bunch of blossoming furze or white spar boulder, how sometimes even the stroke of the wind on the heath will make them suddenly alter their course and start off at a tangent. On encountering a road or pathway the whole herd will tread so as to avoid the beaten surface, as though unwilling to leave any printed sign of their course. When a herd of hinds is being run by tufters over the hilltops, one may count with safety on their fixed habit of running round the contour and by pursuing the opposite side of the hill to that on which the hinds are retreating, one may meet them as they return and create great confusion in their ranks, when they find their time-honoured manœuvre anticipated.

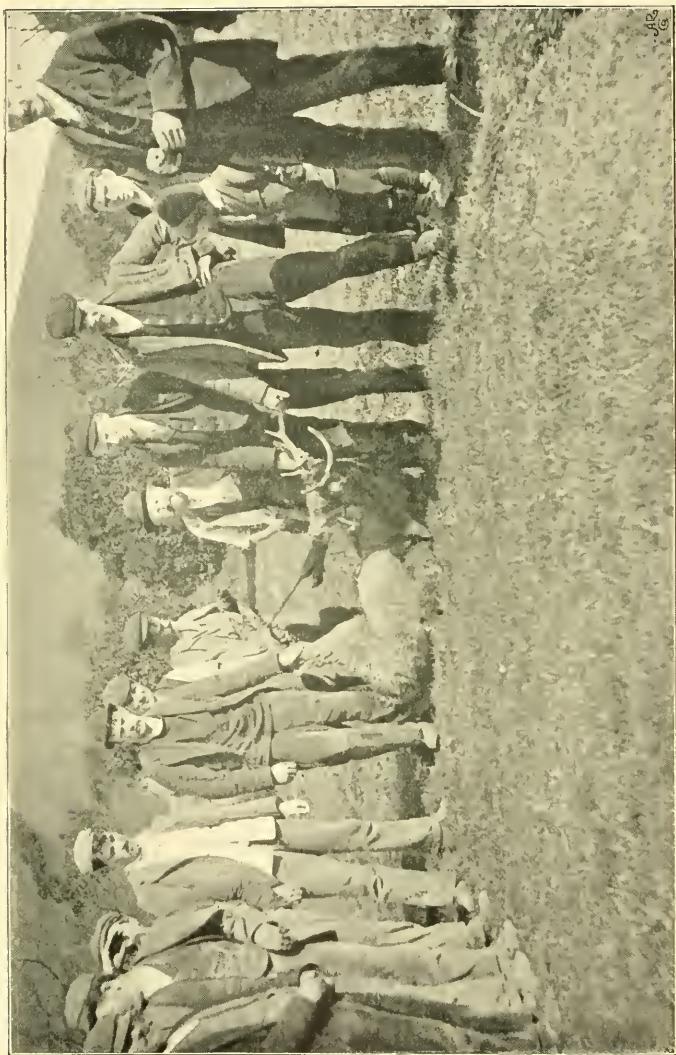
When stags are in their winter herds their manœuvres are much the same, but when they are in season they seem to know that their slower pace and shorter wind does not allow them to take such liberties with their pursuers, and they more frequently bethink themselves of some quiet stronghold at a few miles distance, and go right away from the eager cry of the tufters that have roused them and from the whipper-in's piercing view halloo. The stopping of the tufters is not an invariably easy affair, especially if the stag take several turns in covert before breaking, or if he be

not found exactly where the harbourer denotes, but it has to be done if good sport is to follow, for the pack will never run eagerly if one of their number is ahead of them and the foil consequently covered. Very often however the huntsman finds himself obliged to hunt such a foil, and after awhile his perseverance is generally rewarded by coming up with the truant hound at some water where the stag has baffled his one pursuer, and where it requires man's reason to aid hound's instinct, in order to cope with the stag's craft of self preservation. Old hounds that have been through many a season and have been stopped and stopped again, may perhaps obey the voice of the casual stranger who finds himself with the opportunity to help the hunt servants, but as a rule the great hounds from Exford will hearken to none but those whose voices they know, and who know their names.

The ease with which their master, huntsman and whipper-in control them is well known, it being by no means uncommon to see them stopped by a word across some impassable ravine, and such control is naturally of the very greatest importance in securing a successful issue to the day's undertaking.

All through the days of summer the young hounds are exercised and trained in the way that they should go, and taught to discriminate

LABOURERS WITH DEAD STAG.



between the sweet smelling moorland sheep, as they scamper through the ferns, and their lawful game, and to take no account of the tempting odour of the fox cub, that scuttles along the dewy green track between the expanses of heather, and to pay no attention to the yellow hare, that bounds from her form and strides across the close cropped hilltops, with ears laid back and pattering feet that kick the dusty pollen from the heather bloom.

The noiseless tread of all beasts of the chase is a matter well worthy of observation ; even a weary stag, galloping with failing stride down the hard high road, is barely audible except by his laboured breath ; the fox just unkennelled, rushing over the carpet of crisp brown leaves in covert, makes no more sound than a gust of wind, while a hunted hare coming towards you as you sit silently on your horse observing her, is audible more by her panting breath in the still sunny mornings of midwinter, than by her galloping feet on the trodden pathway, where she tries to baffle the chiming pack that will presently roll her over.

The horns of deer make a curious rattling sound as they rush through dense oak coppice, and that sound once heard will be always recognised by one who loves the chase, and when he hears it he will watch with keen

delight for the appearance of the hunted stag, as he comes down hard driven by the leading hounds to plunge into the river, which he will never leave again until he is drawn ashore to the sound of the angry bay with the notes of the horn ringing over all.

The oaken woods abound in dead twigs and sticks, but except when first rushing from his lair, a stag will pass almost noiselessly through the densest jungle, his horns laid back upon his shoulders, and his muzzle held straight before him, though sometimes at the first alarm, when some enquiring tufter comes pushing through the ferns right up to his broad red haunch he makes wonderful leaps which occasionally end in disaster.

A goodly stag in Kersham Wood near Timberscombe a few seasons since, crouched in his lair until hounds fairly touched him, and then leapt over an adjoining rock, where he fell and damaged himself so badly, that he could only run a very short distance and the day's sport was nil. Another stag in Syndercombe Wood near West Molland had only been roused a few minutes when he made a false step at a wide ditch and broke his back within five minutes of his rousing.

On the moor again one of the treacherous drainage gutters entrapped a four-year-old deer at the head of the Farley Water, and

he too was promptly seized and despatched, rolling down with the leading hounds over a long grassy bank which sloped steeply to the water below.

The tufting, which is often the severest part of the huntsman's work, is done for the most part on pony back, a smart pony of some thirteen hands being a far more desirable mount for nine stone weight amongst the bushy paths and rocky by-ways of the big woodlands than a mettlesome hunter, but when the tufters have been stopped at last, and the pack has come to the starting point, then the huntsman's second horseman produces his first galloper all fresh from some cool stable where he has been waiting his turn, and then the little pony goes home to Exford to prepare for another busy morning amongst the fern brakes and covert paths.

The duties of the second horsemen require no small knowledge of the country and of the habits and customs of deer, the bringing up of a fairly fresh second horse at the critical moment of a great moor run being a by no means easy feat. In the great run from Hawkridge to Glenthorne, in the autumn of 1899, the huntsman's second horse was brought to him at the end of the first nineteen miles, in which there had been no check worthy of the name, and the line had been as straight as

a deer could possibly go across the map. Again in a great run from Culbone Stables to Stentway Bridge, on the Hole Water, Arthur Heal's second horse arrived on the scene directly hounds checked for the first time after being laid on near Hawkcombe Head. At the lay on, hounds in their eagerness, often flash to right or left or run heel for awhile, and the field too is more apt to over ride the line when starting than perhaps at any other time, an hour or two of waiting in the keen moorland air and the opening cry of the pack seldom failing to make horses, if they are really fit to go, pretty much of a handful, and a delay at a crowded gateway or two while hounds are gaining an irrecoverable start does not mend matters. Wide though the plains of Exmoor undoubtedly are, a field of three hundred or so soon makes an impenetrable crowd when a hillside path is encountered, or a stream has to be crossed at a rocky ford, and then patience and philosophy are the only supports to the good man and true who would be forward when the chase is stirring.

The fine filmy dust of certain roads that are much used in the dry days of August, will rise and hang in a long white line above such spots as the Lynton Road, from Pittcombe Head to Culbone Stables, when the pack is brought out in haste to be laid upon the foil of a forest-going deer, and a day amongst the North Devon

highways and by-ways of the South Molton country will send its participators home with dusty hats and garments, a decided taste in their mouths, and the clatter of innumerable hoofs on macadam still ringing in their ears, as they drop off into that sound slumber which is seldom denied to a weary staghunter.

Amongst pilots and their followers, like follows like: he who is greedy for a gallop selects some pilot who is well mounted like himself, while paterfamilias, who is introducing his daughters to the chase that he loved in his youth, will point out some steady going resident, who can be relied upon not to cover more ground than is absolutely necessary, and to avoid the traps and peat holes and the dangerous going which is every here and there to be found, and which come so unexpectedly in the line of an average gallop. There are many who will follow a pilot up to a certain point, but when they see him stop or swerve without any apparent reason, while hounds appear to them to be running exactly as they did before, will carry on at full speed and find themselves, to their surprise, either in difficult ground, or beneath the correcting lash of the master's tongue. How often on the swampy plains of Acmead, where the ponies graze knee-deep amid the lush green moor grass, has one seen a string of white garmented sportsmen suddenly forsake

their pilot, because he pulled his horse to a trot, well knowing the holding nature of the ground to which they were coming. Then they rush to their undoing, one hireling after another flounders and staggers and rolls over, or recovers itself to catch its shaken and surprised rider at the critical moment.

If the moor had only been left entirely alone, its traps and pitfalls would be far less numerous than they are, but every attempt at husbandry, every stroke of the spade, has made a snare for the horseman, each gutter remains from year to year and from decade to decade, while each peat cutting remains a morass in which many horses might lie buried. Many a glorious plain over which one might gallop like the wind in dry weather, has been made most difficult riding, seamed gridiron fashion with countless gutters with unsound sides, that never completely fill up ; add to this innumerable cart ruts sheltered by the heather and the grass, and rocky paths with fixed and rolling stones, and river fords that have their moving boulders and slippery ledges ; add deep tussocky heather and springheads overgrown with floating grass and weed, and you have a country that is all right when you know it, but you have to know it first.

One of the most awe inspiring parts of Red Deer Land is that which borders on the

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WAITING FOR THE STAG UNDER COUNTSBURY FORELAND,

Severn Sea. Along the cliffs from Ashley Combe to Countisbury Foreland there are paths and ways which overhang a rock bound beach by a giddy drop of some three hundred feet. Several times each season beaten deer betake themselves to these cliffs, and by paths where few can follow them make their way to salt water, or sometimes reach the boulders of the beach and running along reclimb the ramparts, and return to the moor a mile or two further up or down the coast. These cliff paths are uncanny places into which to venture with any but the quietest and handiest of mounts, for one may sometimes find oneself upon a sheep track which winds from slope to slope until it ends in some sheer drop or cascade of rolling shilletts where a horse has no room or foothold to turn round, and the close cropped turf moreover is exceedingly slippery when burnt brown by an August sun, and a horse whose shoes are worn smooth has little chance to maintain his foothold if he makes the least mistake.

A fall here means an avalanche of loose stones and *débris*, a bumping roll to the edge of the sheer cliff below and then a sickening fall upon the jagged rocks or into the boiling surf.

The woods of these rain swept precipices are curious to look at. Here cling in the

combes, oaks ancient and gnarled and lichen covered, with bent and withered limbs and grotesque shapes, the survivors of a thousand winter gales, living a hard life indeed, and as different as possible from their straight stemmed relations in the sheltered combes inland. Seagulls wheel and scream amid the rocks below, while in these low boughs countless pigeons roost in the winter nights, when the southerly gales pass humming high overhead, and this north coast lies sheltered. Amid the ledges of rock and the overhanging ivy many a cliff fox has his kennel, whence he steals out at dusk to climb to the farm lands above, secure that if he can only regain his unapproachable den no hound can ever follow him and that the passing steamer's siren will be the only horn that he will ever hear.

The raven and the brown buzzard haunt these solitary rocks, and an occasional pair of peregrine falcons use certain benches which are covered with a white *débris* of bones and feathers.

Descending these cliffs in pursuit of beaten deer is only possible in certain places, but once down it is a far more difficult affair to regain the summit, where one's horse stands patiently awaiting one's return. Hunting boots are by no means suitable for cliff climbing, and a heavy rain-sodden coat makes matters

worse, while the hounds are very apt to dislodge loose stones and boulders, and to make matters very precarious for the venturesome few who climb down to witness the last scene, and to assist in the difficult task of securing a fighting stag on such dangerous ground.

At times a stag will take to salt water, and after a short swim will come ashore again, only to find himself confronted by the huntsman and his pack, emerging from behind some mighty rock to close with him in the tumbling surf. Looking down from the heights above, the majority of the field gets a birds-eye view of the tiny figures below; the deer plainly outlined against the white boiling streak of surf, the hounds just visible as black dots, a dozen or so of people on foot, crawling slowly and with difficulty over the boulders, which at that height appear no more than pebbles. Here the melodious sound of the bay is heard to its utmost perfection, the dull booming of the waves giving a setting as it were to the mingled roar from some twenty or thirty deep-toned throats that rolls and echoes up the age-worn cliffs, while the horn, thin and distant, sounds silvery and high above the chorus.

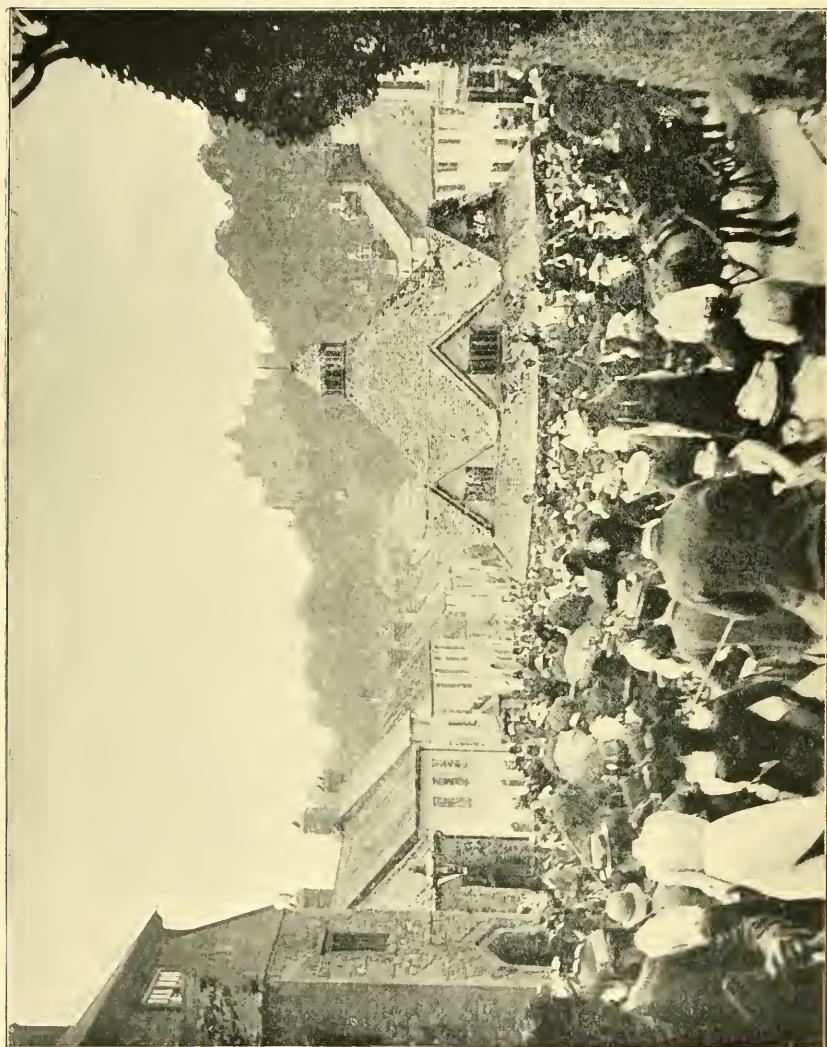
Deer have not unfrequently to be left where they are killed amongst the rocks, and sometimes even it proves impossible to draw the

venison out of reach of the waves, while one has to keep a watchful eye on the swift advances of the tide, lest one be cut off from one's only path of return to the heights above. When the sea is calm enough the Porlock Weir boat will take off the carcase of the slain deer, and with a favourable breeze, will be back at the beach in front of the Anchor Hotel before the last horseman has fairly regained the Lynton Road. In climbing up again from the wild and desolate scene on the beach, in times of heavy rainfall the scanty foothold is especially yielding and treacherous, each tuft of grass or mountain shrub may come away by the roots as one grasps it in struggling up, and the rolling stones are more than ever liable to form a miniature avalanche and hurry the adventurous hunter down to the hungry rocks below. A few hundred yards out some heavily freighted pleasure steamer is generally to be seen speeding homewards to Cardiff or Weston-super-Mare, its decks packed with tourists who have been having a happy day at Lynmouth or Ilfracombe ; if the evening is fine, the sound of music floats clear across the gently heaving waters. Then as the harvest sun dips into its western bed, in a glory of cloud colouring, the sombre cliffs light up with all manner of shades of lake and carmine and purple, the pearl grey sea blushes with a pale pink radiance, and even the stunted

oaks that remember the days of the Druids reflect on their tough old stems the warm gleam of the after glow. The tinkle of the music fades away up channel, the lighthouse lamps shine clear across the deep, the ravens, scared anon, drop back to their familiar roosting place, and below, where he fought and died, the stag, if he could not be reached that day, lies till to-morrow's tide shall allow the boat to come close in and carry him away, to provide a haunch perhaps for the master's venison feast at Porlock.



THE MEET—DUNSTER.



CHAPTER IX.

DUNSTER—HUNTING IN HOT WEATHER—A DREAM OF THE PAST—VIEW HOLLOAS—ANOTHER GRAVEYARD—AN EXTRAORDINARY TROPHY—PORLOCK WEIR—THE BOAT—SHEEP KILLING—DROWNING AT SEA—THE SENIOR PACK.



The Devon and Somerset country has many districts all differing in type, with different soils, and different formations, some of them being separated from the

others by stretches of country untenanted by deer, and it is to these unstocked tracts that it is the constant endeavour, during hind-hunting at any rate, of the executive to drive some single deer, when a successful chase becomes almost assured.

Historic Dunster sees the staghounds several times each year and its great annual meet in

the staghunting season, following its Horse Show day brings together an exceeding great concourse of pursuers and sight-seers, so readily is the home of the Luttrells approached by road and rail. Minehead, with its fast growing population, lies near by and turns out in force to attend this meet, and the many villages around all send their contingents of horse, foot and wheel men. Alcombe and Timberscombe, Carhampton and Bilbrook, Stogumber and Williton are all in easy reach of the long wide street on which Dunster Castle looks down, and this same street by the hour of eleven becomes thronged indeed at the Yarn-market end. The great hounds lie panting on the dusty red stones of the roadway opposite the low arched frontal of the Luttrell Arms Hotel, and round them presses an inquiring and admiring crowd, as thickly packed as upon Cloutsham Ball, or at the corner of Bagborough Plantation. The district round Dunster is one which of all others need a heavy and recent rainfall to enable hounds to do good work, for its dry and gravelly soil holds no scent to speak of unless well moistened, and the neighbouring hilltops are so plentifully besprinkled with a growth of gorse as to make most unpleasant travelling for hounds and even for horses. The deer too, seem to realise that hounds cannot follow them with such

swiftness and certainty over these close cropped solitudes, and immediately choose the most prickly of the ground over which to lay their course. Grabhist Hill at the back of Dunster Town is a very favourite spot for hardy pedestrians on all days when the staghounds are anywhere in the neighbourhood, and from the grassy paths that line its long ridge much hunting can be seen, whether the chase lies over the stony sides of Croydon Hill or threads the thicket of the Broad Wood coverts or passes away to Timberscombe Common or Great Headon Plantation. Many a time and oft has a Slowley stag fled by way of Long Wood or Kitwall Farm to ford the Aville Brook and climb the steep front of Grabhist hillside to the great delight of the patient watchers who have chosen this spot to await the chase. Then while the fugitive climbs with heaving flank and panting breath to the crest of Grabhist, hounds appear on the southern skyline, a scarce visible distant mass of small white specks, while the field, a larger collection of moving objects, presses on in their wake, dividing into numerous strings and sections as hounds pass through the leafy depth of Long Wood, and streams from one covert to another of the Dunster Castle estate, until they come down with unerring instinct to the spot where the quarry has splashed through the stream which comes down

from the southern slopes of Dunkery to supply Timberscombe and Dunster.

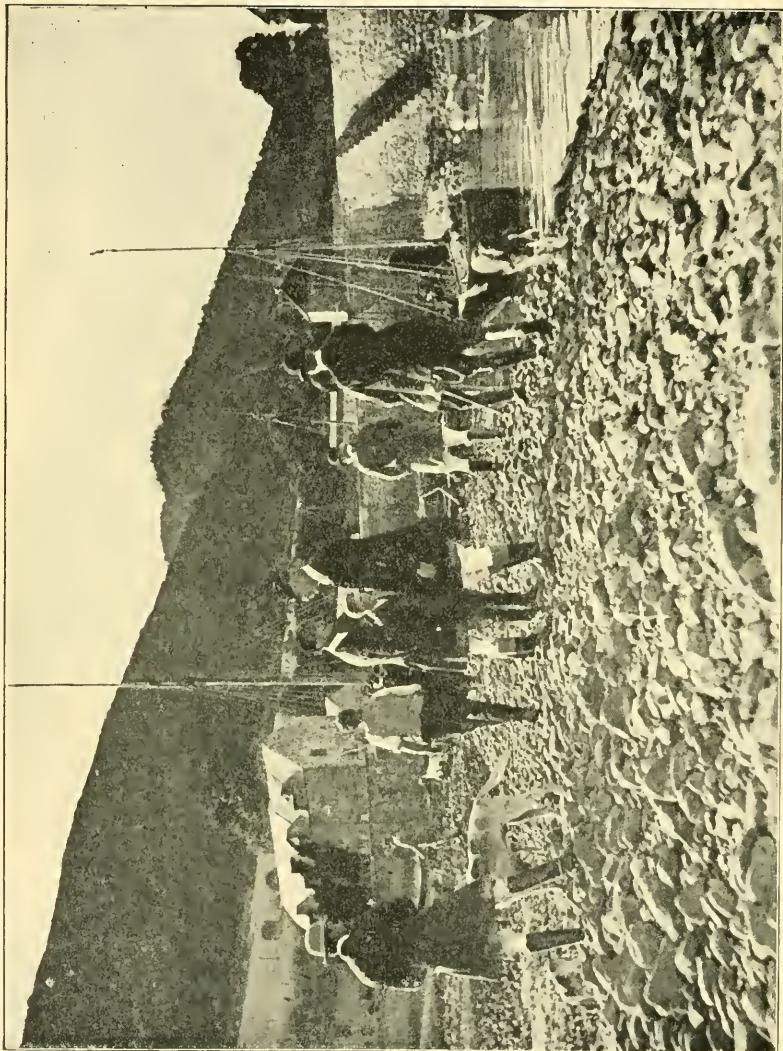
Intense heat and glare and abundant dust and a plague of horse flies are what one expects at the great Dunster meet, and so different is the climate down here at sea level that deer hunting seems a very different matter from what it did but a few days before on the towering heights of Dunkery or Hawkcombe Head. Dunster Park lends itself particularly to the chase of the wild red deer; nowhere is the chase seen to greater advantage than here upon the short turf of the undulating knolls that sweep down towards the Castle lawns. Between the ancient oak stems some Slowley stag of square and ponderous haunch gallops with stately stride past a wondering herd of fallow buck, whose ancestors perhaps were brought from Normandy by Baron Mohun, then comes the distant cry of the pursuing pack, the silvery twanging of the huntsman's horn and in a trice the glade is full of rushing forms. The park deer scurry in wild alarm to right and left, the great hounds stride on upon the red deer's foil, and bestow no glance or thought upon the herd of small stuff, which might well distract their attention as they pass before them in easy view. The scarlet coats press on beside the racing pack, the field canters down the easy slope of turf, that is

not without its stumbling blocks in the shape of constant ant-hills, and so the chase passes by, much as it may have done on any autumn afternoon since the days of the Saxons, with the same old oaks looking down upon the sport and the romantic pile of Dunster Castle crowning the landscape. Probably the music of the chase has altered not a little, just as its pace has much increased, even since times which are only comparatively historic ; the short straight horn of to-day has succeeded the longer and more musical instrument of former times, the hounds too have little to say until their great red quarry turns to bay, whereas the hounds that worked these happy hunting grounds before them in the ages long gone by had tuneful throats and used them as St. Hubert would have liked, but the hunting cries and view halloas remain much the same, though Norman French no longer is the language of the hunter, still in hunting cries there are faint traces which may serve to remind us that our forbears chased the noble deer for many a century before the odorous fox was thought worth hunting.

A good voice is always a desirable possession in a huntsman or whip, but nowhere perhaps is it more necessary than in the deep woods and wild combes which the deer affect, and nowhere can the clear strains of a trained throat be heard

to better advantage or more wholly fit in with the nature of the spot. For wild deer hunting is of all our English field sports the most romantic and the one that appeals with most effect to the poetic side of those upon whom grand scenery and colouring and beautiful sounds have an influence. To many no doubt of an average field the aesthetic enjoyment of some particularly happy grouping of the moving figures of the chase is of small moment, but to those to whom it is given to see natural beauties, and to hear melodies in the tumbling of the surf on the rock bound coast, or to feel the difference between a well pitched halloo, echoing from the depths of a combe and the same words uttered unmusically, there is endless entertainment in staghunting, especially if the skies be propitious. From afar one may distinguish in the depths of leafy Horner the well-known voice of some habitual staghunter who views the deer, and from afar one may tell by the different tone of the huntsman's horn what he wishes to convey.

The stones of Dunkery's Graveyard are reproduced on a smaller scale on the bold weather beaten top of Croydon Hill that overlooks the villages of Timberscombe and Luxborough. A scanty growth of heath for many a century had hidden the litter of loose boulders that now stand revealed, owing to



Porlock Weir,
LORD ERINGTON, MASTER HUGH FORTESCUE, MR. EVERED, MR. A. B. HEINEMANN,
Dr. F. RICHARDSON CROSSE.

the action of a recent hill fire of great magnitude which swept away the covering of hundreds of acres, and then rushed on its path of fiery destruction into the Broadwood Plantations of the Dunster Castle estate, and projected belts and tongues of destroying flaine amongst the coppice and scrub oak of Longwood. In former years a run from Slowley towards the Aville Brook invariably produced a certain number of empty saddles as the chase in its progress swept over Croydon Hill, but blind though the stones were by reason of the growth upon them, they formed far preferable riding to their present condition, indeed the shingle of the beach in Porlock Bay is nearly as suitable for a galloping ground as this denuded hilltop. For the first year or two wide tracts of black, dusty ashes and burnt sandy earth proved an insuperable obstacle to hounds, in that they carried absolutely no scent at all even when wet, so that on coming to such an expanse, the huntsman had no alternative but to lift his pack bodily fowards, following the slot as he might without much difficulty do, until the burnt tract had been crossed and left behind and natural ground succeeded.

Adjoining this stony area is a wide tract of the very spikiest and toughest gorse of the whole west country, and into the middle of

this uncomfortable growth, hinds, in particular, will always lead the pack if they can possibly contrive to do so. Although their own feet and legs suffer not a little in galloping over this dense and prickly carpet, they evidently know well its virtues in arresting the progress of their enemies the hounds.

The Slowley coverts, with their warm lying and red soil, and with the good feeding which the deer obtain upon some of the farms in their neighbourhood, have always been famous for the good heads they produce, and to the credit of the neighbouring Minehead district must be laid the record trophy secured by Mr. Sanders during his long and successful term of office.

The Selworthy, Slowley, and Minehead herds constantly travel to and fro and intermingle, so that a stag may be seen in either one of these districts to-day, and with all likelihood be reported as an inhabitant of another covert by to-morrow morning. This particular stag carried a most curious division of the beam on the top of the near horn and abounded in points, large and small, numbering seventeen all told. One curious point about him was, that although various large deer had been seen and harboured in these allied districts, yet this identical stag's presence had never been detected until within a season or two of his capture, so that he would seem

to be another instance of those many deer who hide themselves so effectively during the autumn months as to be quite unknown, even to those whose business it is to make themselves acquainted with all the larger and more conspicuous members of the herd, until by some lucky chance they bring themselves into the harbourer's ken, and on some fine hunting morning find themselves suddenly approached in their well concealed lair by the inquisitive noses of the questing tufters.

This stag was taken in the spring of 1901, when the snow lay deep on every other part of the home country, and was entirely unharboured ; Tivington Plantation was drawn at a venture and he was found with comparatively little trouble. He then ran to such purpose that he out-distanced the field and the greater part of the pack, but a few couples of hounds followed closely on his foil through Longwood to Kingsbridge, and he was there secured and killed before the huntsman's arrival. His head was set up with the winter coat on, and forms a striking contrast to the appearance of an ordinary autumn head.

The custom still prevails at Exford of mounting the generality of heads with the frontal bone alone remaining to carry the horns. On this white surface is painted the date and main features of the chase, and the whole is

mounted upon an oaken escutcheon. The heads, as of old, become the property of the master, and are occasionally presented by him to those covert owners whose preserves produce the noblest supply of warrantable deer.

While any stag with not less than two long points on either top may be run, what is sought for by the harbourer is to find if possible a stag with three atop upon each horn, it being tolerably certain then that the animal roused will be not less than seven years old, and consequently will well repay the difficulties of the chase. Two atop deer are wont to give both hounds and horses far more than they can do in the hot days of August, and their speed moreover carries them so far ahead of their pursuers that their scent is apt to wax faint and unreliable, and in that way alone the sport is less desirable than with a heavier animal that, trusting to his cunning rather than to his speed, clears only a short distance between himself and the hounds, and consequently leaves an abundant and enticing scent which quickens the pace and keeps the interest fully alive. Then too there is always the doubt as a heavy stag enters each covert in succession whether he will succeed in putting up fresh deer, but in the leafy days of autumn, when hinds and their calves are separate and hidden in the thickest retreats, stags do not so often succeed in finding

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FISHERMEN WITH STAG AFTER KILL—PORLOCK WEIR.

company. Increased numbers and increased hunting have rendered the Exmoor deer more clever than ever in running to herds, and nothing but the pace, which is constantly increasing too, prevents them from looking for their comrades whenever they find themselves in the least danger.

Porlock Weir is a chosen spot whence many a generation of staghunters has enjoyed the noble sport, and it is well placed indeed for many of the best meets. Save that one has a steep hill to climb it is within very easy reach of all the great plains of heather that lie before the eye in looking outward from Culbone Stables and when the days have turned colder and the rain clouds begin to sweep across the moor, the seaside climate and warm shelter of Porlock Weir form a very acceptable change to the bleak heights over which the deer are always travelling. One great feature of the Weir is the deer-catching boat with its lusty crew of swarthy fishermen, who have brought to hand many a score of deer that have made their last bid for safety by striking out to sea. On this rock bound coast there are many states of the weather when no boat can live at sea, but whenever it is possible to venture Noah Pollard and his merry men can be relied upon to secure a swimming deer however far out to sea he

may have gone or the tide may have carried him.

A new deer-fence that has been erected by the Earl of Lovelace for the protection of his farms at Culbone has turned away towards the moor many a deer that would otherwise have gone to sea near Ashley Combe, but the Weir boat still has many a call down the coast to Glenthorne or upwards across the dancing waters of Porlock Bay towards Hurlstone Point.

This cruel headland with its serrated ledges of surf beaten rock, drops sheer into the tumbling water from the grassy slopes of North Hill, and at its most weather beaten extremity deer from time to time dash into the sea.

A certain one horned stag that ran to this point from Haddon in the October of 1888, after covering the distance in one hour and fifty minutes from the time of his rousing in the fields above the Lady's Drive at Steart, broke from his bay here, and striking boldly out to sea, swam round the headland and was carried by the tide and his own efforts for some miles towards Minehead, landing at last near Greenaleigh and being safely taken. This stag was subsequently sent to Lord Rothschild and shewed several good runs before his pack.

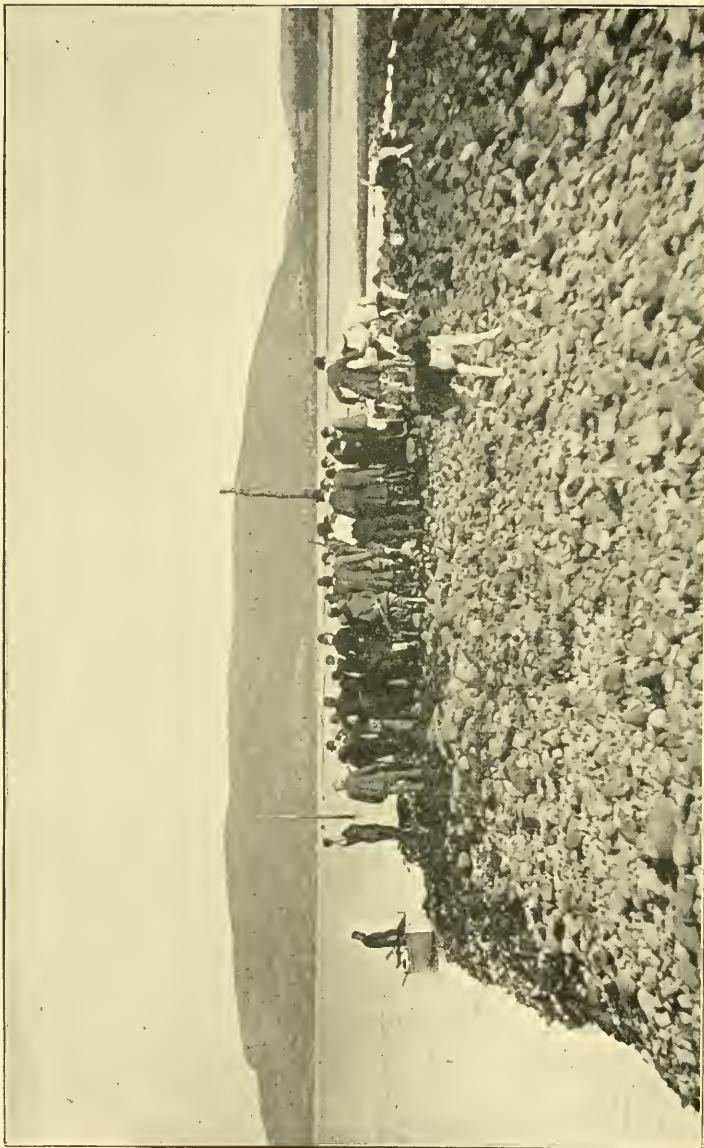
It is not far from Hurlstone Point, on the sunburnt sheepwalks near East Myne, that a great outbreak of sheep killing by the pack took place in recent years, and caused the early demise of many promising young hounds. On the slippery precipices between Hennerscombe and Grexy there was absolutely no scope for the intervention of the hunt servants and a long wait in kennel had previously rendered the puppies fit for treason, strategy and spoil, when as ill luck would have it, on being taken out to try for their stag, a flock of horned sheep bounded through their midst, just where control was impossible. The ill effect of this outbreak was subsequently felt in the course of the great and famous run from Hawkridge to Glenthorne, when a part of the pack turned aside from the hot pursuit of their hunted deer, and on Cheriton Ridge, after twelve miles of galloping, turned their attention to mutton. If special pains were not taken in the summer training of the young hounds such offences would probably be of annual occurrence, but owing to sedulous care it is only on the very rarest occasions that sheep-killing shows itself, and then condemnation is the only possible verdict for the hound that has been found guilty.

Hurlstone Point is best seen towards sundown when the western rays slanting low and

warm upon its ledges and hollows add a glow to every tint of the grey face of water-worn rock. These ledges form perilous climbing, and if a stag once takes his stand on some out-lying bench, it is often most difficult to get near enough to him with a rope to secure him, while for hounds there is the double peril of encountering his antlers or being knocked over the edge to fall on to the jagged points below, or haply to be drowned in the heaving surf.

The swimming powers of deer are very great indeed, but they have their limits, and deer are more often drowned at sea than is supposed. The chill of the water is sufficient at times to drown a beaten deer, and it has occasionally happened that a stag or hind has been seen to drown in comparatively still water, when they might have returned with ease to the beach. Many a deer too in striking boldly out through the waters of Porlock Bay finds him or herself suddenly entrapped in the race of the tide way, where deep water succeeds the comparatively few fathoms of the bay. Swung round and round and hurried through a choppy sea, at a distance of a mile or so from shore, a beaten deer, already thoroughly chilled with a long swim is very likely to fall a victim to the curl and wash of the breaking waves, driven by some sweeping westerly breeze, and then,

DEAD STAG, HURLSTONE POINT IN DISTANCE.



except for the chance neighbourhood of some coasting trader or sailing ship, the carcase is never recovered, but floats to and fro, to be cast ashore many miles away some days later. Steamers, in passing up or down channel, have occasionally sighted the floating carcase of a deer that has been lost at sea in this way, and in this connection a long swim taken by a Quantock deer from the beach near St. Audries is well worthy of record.

In a dead calm this stag swam straight out into the smooth grey waters of the Bristol Channel, the pack following close in his wake and baying melodiously as they swam in full view of his noble head. Out and out they went, further and further from the mud and seaweed of the shore, the stag just keeping his distance, and the pack tailing off by slow degrees until they faded from sight in the grey hazy distance, while ever and anon came back fainter and fainter their deep harmonious tones like bells on the surface of the waters. Post haste a horseman galloped into Watchet town, and ere an hour had passed a boat had come to the spot where the deer had struck off, and its crew were told the direction in which the swimming pack had last been seen. Striking off at a tangent, the boat held her course much further up Channel than appeared necessary, but the drift of the turning tide had now to be taken into account,

and in much less time than seemed probable, the boat returned to the anxious watchers on the rocks, towing the stag, already dead with the chill of the water, and with seven hounds on board, one of which had already succumbed merely to the effects of his long swim. Another drowned hound shortly was seen, and two others never returned to land.

By sea and rock, and stag's antler, and horse's heel, the great hounds have much peril to go through, so that a veteran of six seasons, who has survived all these dangers and the strain of summer heat and winter cold, and the deadly chill of the rushing rivers with their icy flood, when the blood is heated to boiling point by a long and rapid chase, is the exception rather than the rule.

Deer are almost always faster swimmers than hounds, and take to all water whether salt or fresh with evident delight, but it sometimes happens that on dashing into the sea hounds are quick enough to secure their stag before he can swim clear of them, and once out of his depth a stag is easily mastered by a couple of bold and resolute hounds, inasmuch as he can no longer use feet or antlers, and if seized by the ear is easily drowned. When hunted deer have been to sea and have come ashore again, they may often be seen standing in the knee-deep surf, as though unwilling to create a fresh

THE END OF A GOOD RUN—MINEHEAD CLIFFS.



trail of scent on the land, whereby their pursuers may follow them, but in the same line of white tumbling foam lies one of their dangers, for though amongst the boulders of a rocky beach or further out amongst the tumbling breakers they may be hard to distinguish from the crest of the cliffs above, yet when they stand defined against the snow white line of surf they are easily espied and then their troubles thicken. Often they will go to sea again and again, only to find themselves met each time by the indefatigable huntsman, whose chief care is to keep his shivering hounds as far as possible out of the numbing chill of the water and in the lea of some headland of rock that may break the force of the breeze.

For the winds blow rough on Exmoor and in all its neighbourhood, and the rain falls cold and heavy, and the life of hounds and horses is one in which the elements are generally averse, and much has to be endured. Driven by the gale the sheets of rain fly level along the hillsides in misty columns, which strike through the thickest protection, and a couple of hours on an exposed sea beach at the end of a heated chase will stiffen the pack almost beyond recognition.

To carry much weight over a country so hilly horses need much careful management, and the chief strain comes at the time of

year when they are still naturally soft and out of condition and it is the nursing of a good horse through a great run that is the best test of the judgment of a practised rider on the moor. The stamp of horses employed is improving from year to year, greatly owing no doubt to the agency of the annual horse show at Exford instituted by Viscount Ebrington, and there is also a growing tendency amongst hunting visitors to bring their own horses to Exmoor instead of relying entirely upon the efforts of the local job masters. These latter too have improved enormously their class of animal and pay far more attention than formerly to the great question of condition, without careful attention to which no horse can follow the staghounds regularly throughout the busy time. Many heavy weights are carried well through the longest and fastest runs, but it is on the yielding surface of the moor that the welter weight is most at a disadvantage, and it is here that knowledge of country avails least, although of course it is still a great advantage. For here the hounds get quicker from point to point than they do amongst enclosures and frequent woodlands, here the scent is generally more burning, except in wet or threatening weather, when the heavy moisture on the long moor grass and heather is apt to hinder hounds from doing their best. On the

moor, however, deer can more easily find company than in any other part, and their manœuvres amongst a herd inevitably give a chance to the tail of the hunt to pick up lost ground.

A rider of ten stone on a blood horse that has some idea of going down hill should be able to live with the leading hounds almost anywhere on Exmoor, but there are many of the softer parts where, after rain, he must take a pull if he would not invite an over-reach, or presently drop heavily into one of the abundant drainage gutters that at a slower pace can be negotiated with ease and comfort by any horse that will look where he is going.

In the ardour of the chase one may and frequently does find oneself in an apparently endless maze of peat cuttings, where one necessarily must take a little time to pick a way, as no horse can do himself justice in leaping on the edge of a quaking turf pit with a spongy take off and a miry landing up to his knees or girths. A few moments spent here in twisting to and fro between the quagmires while the hounds drive gaily ahead are well spent, and can soon be regained when one has pushed past the treacherous tract and the sounder going, never very far off, has been reached. The old rule is true as ever that one must get down to the water in each quickly

succeeding combe with the hounds, for although one may hold one's own on the level plain above, or in the rather abrupt descent to the boulder strewn channel of the forest stream, it is quite certain that when once the hounds have struck the stag's point of departure on the opposite side they will leave the best of horses in the struggling climb to the next hilltop, and to hurry a game hunter up such hills as these must shortly bring him to a standstill. When hounds are crossing country where the hills are high and the combes therefore deep, still more time must be taken, and it is often far better to circumnavigate the head of a long deep combe than to struggle across its depths where the hounds actually passed. Hills and gates take time, and the breathless heat of the narrow valleys takes the spring out of the freshest horse, and the longest way round is often the shortest way home.

A big horse on short legs is the one that will see the end of more runs with the Devon and Somerset than his stable mates, which might perhaps be better suited for negotiating fences; deep girth is essential and the more pony and thorough-bred he has in him the better.

The stag-hunting district is so wide that it covers several foxhunting and harrier territories, and there come besides all manner of masters of hounds from other parts, so that on some

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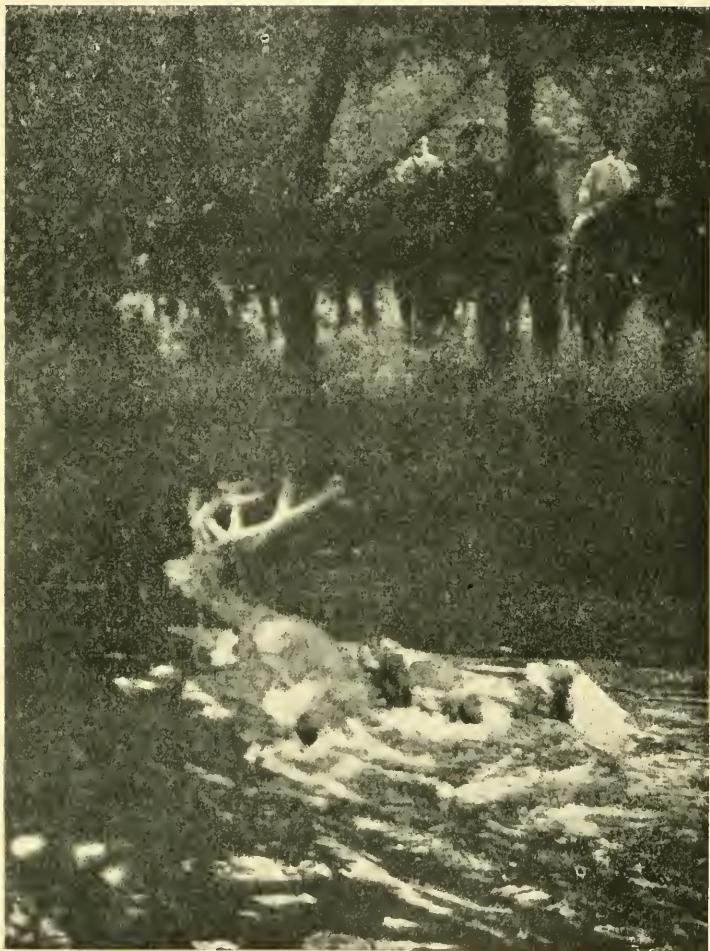
HORNER WATER.

days in August the field is thickly sprinkled with very keen critics. It must be remembered, however, that, except in the New Forest, there is no criterion by which to analyse the ways and methods of the chase of the wild stag as carried on on Exmoor from time immemorial. French methods no doubt adhere more closely to the old established ideas, but the establishment at Exford has moved with the times as they are in modern England, and the changes made have been proved necessary by the march of events. On a broad survey they would seem to lie chiefly in the increased speed of the chase and its adaptation to the entertainment of greatly increased fields, that while peopling the whole country side in the short autumnal season, demand a far greater quantity of their favourite sport than was the case in the years of which former works on this subject tell.

Being the senior pack by a very long lead indeed, the other packs which pursue foxes, hares, and otters in the wild west country defer their appointments to the arrangements made at Exford; but the shifting habits of deer frequently falsify all calculations, and the best laid schemes for the rousing of some particularly heavy deer are apt to go wrong, especially after harvest has once begun. For when an old stag's favourite feeding ground amongst the succulent corn has all at once been invaded by noisy

machines and equally noisy reapers, who finish up their day with a cheerful rabbit hunt from the last patch of corn after the manner of their kind, the old stag in his lair inside the covert fence registers a vow that he will be off as soon as ever it becomes dark enough to move in safety, and that he will travel as many miles as he can from such a noisy spot. Lucky is he indeed if some inquiring sheepdog does not nose his way in the course of a hot August afternoon through his well trodden rack in the covert fence and thread the path that his mighty feet have beaten through the fern beds to the muddy pool where he is wont to take his morning roll, and then questing to and fro, has not roused him with a crash and a bound from his comfortable and solitary lair.





THEY HAVE HIM.

CHAPTER X.

REMARKABLE HEADS—THE RECORD WEIGHT—SOUVENIRS OF THE CHASE—TAKING A STAG—THE SEVERN SEA—BEACON FIRES—HORNER MILL WHEEL—VENISON—THE RUTTING SEASON—CRIPPLED DEER—SLOTTING—WARRANTABLE OR OTHERWISE—NORTH HILL—BLACK GAME.



UNDER many a roof in West Somerset and North Devonshire are to be found handsome trophies of the chase in the shape of the spreading antlers of bygone monarchs of the wood and moor that have been taken with hounds. In former years it was

a not uncommon practice to gild the extreme tips of particularly fine pairs of horns, and

many a good head has been mounted in the skin, but after a few years the ravages of moths, as in the case of the great St. Audries head, which has lately had to be reduced to the frontal bones, are apt to destroy the handsome coat which becomes the stag so well in his lifetime; the ears go first, the fleck drops off piecemeal, and then the skin yields by slow degrees to the insidious attacks of time and insects. The measurements of the above mentioned head, which claims first place amongst wild trophies secured in the British Isles, have been given in a previous chapter, but two years later Mr. Sanders in his first season took two very notable deer. The first of them was the fourteen pointer described in the narrative of the run of the 19th July, 1896—a very early date for a staghunt—and the second was a stag with the extraordinary spread of $38\frac{1}{4}$ inches; from outside to inside at the fork. This stag was roused in Reddeleave after a meet at Winsford Village, on the 23rd of August, and ran very pluckily by way of Haddon to the Bittescombe coverts, whence he was driven, after a rousing fresh find in Sir John Ferguson Davie's lower lake, to the railway embankment at Petton Chapel. Passing this obstacle he presently stood at bay in the muddy channel of the Lupton water, and upon being handled proved to carry a rounded knob on one of his three points on the near

top and two similar knobs on the off top. Fourteen inches and a-half seems to be somewhere about the limit of size for the curve of brow antlers, while seven and a-half inches appears to be the record girth of beam between brow and bay antlers. A noble beast, from the Stoodleigh coverts, taken by Mr. Ian Heathcote Amory with the Tiverton Staghounds near Chain Bridge in the autumn of 1897, weighed, when cleaned and dry, no less than 333 lbs; which, reckoned according to the custom of the country, would amount to 16 score 13 lbs. This I believe to be the record weight, for the West Country at any rate, if not for the British Islands, the Scotch method of weighing being of course entirely different and would have included all that had been removed from this woodland giant. This stag's horn measured round outer curve from burr to tip the notable length of 39½ inches.

Well matched pairs of shed horns are in great demand, and are frequently worth a bank note to their lucky finders, but as deer frequently carry one horn longer than the other, and shed it on some feeding ground a mile or two distant from the spot where the first was dropped, the matching of odd horns between the different persons who handle them is a matter of much bargaining, always a slow affair with a hill country man.

Freaks are more common than evenly balanced well grown heads, an even head of three atop each side being only secured once or twice in a season, and the extra growth of a well favoured stag's horns seems more generally to run into odd points and widenings than to go to fill out the beam and strengthen the rights or antlers in symmetrical fashion. Palmated and thickened tops occur with most frequency on the Quantock range, where the herd is to a certain extent inbred, in spite of the numbers to which it has attained of late years; double brow and double bay antlers are met with from time to time, and nondescript growths springing from one horn or the other have given certain deer the appearance of bearing three horns.

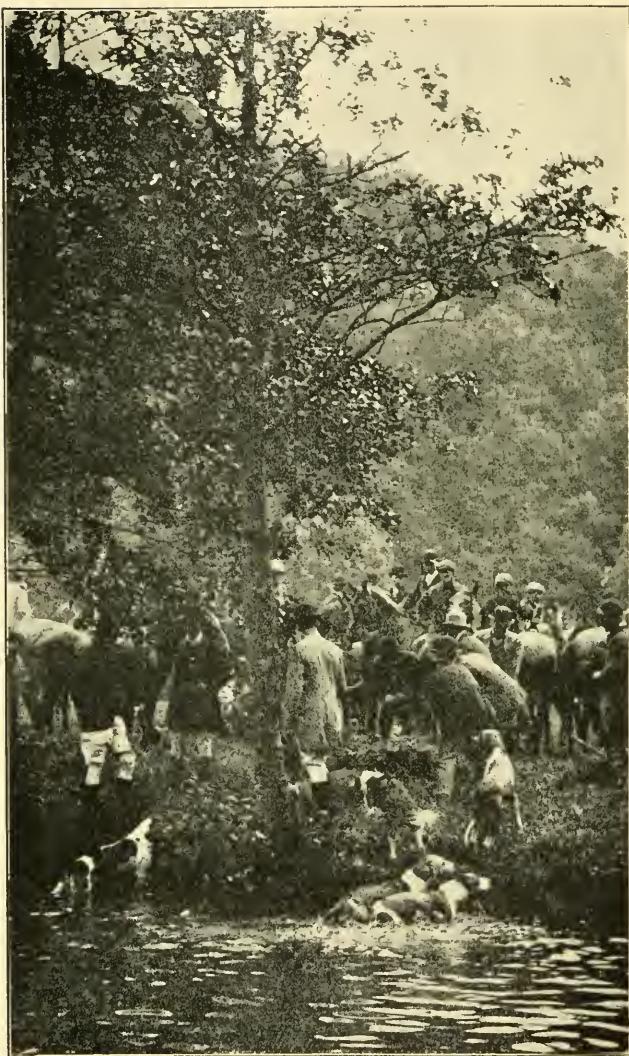
A certain switch-horned stag that frequented Haddon for several years had one eye completely blinded by the downward growth of his deformed horn, but he shed his encumbrance eventually and died fighting with two normal horns, though still of course minus an eye. Bits of stick sometimes get wedged into a growing horn and cause curious malformations, falls and fights splinter the points of antlers and tops, and one horned deer are by no means uncommon.

A suitable mounting for shed horns is often made from an oaken shield carved in the semblance of bracken fronds or oak-apple boughs,

and when nicely coloured falls in well with the wild character of the eight or ten pounds of dark and deeply corrugated horn above it. Fantastic armchairs have been fashioned from a number of selected horns, forming seats more curious than comfortable. Bolted together with iron stays they form strong and durable seats for verandah or entrance hall, but their many projecting points are very apt to catch in the garments of the occupier. The tanned hides of hinds, cured without the fleck, afford excellent material for the covering of dining room chairs, wearing to a good surface and darkening with age to a rich colour, while the softer skins used inside out, make the best of hunting waistcoats. For gaiters and shoes they are hardly so effective, as they too readily absorb the wet. The slots of young deer that have met their end by misadventure, form handsome handles for presentation cutlery, if taken off at the knee instead of at the fetlock joint. Shod with neat silver shoes, and with the horn brightly polished, they form an attractive wedding gift, and if the junction of steel blade and shank bone be neatly encircled by a band of chased Dutch silver work the effect is all the better.

Stag's skins killed in the autumn form handsome mats, but the fleck wears loose in time and then they lose their appearance.

Every labourer who can get close enough to the carcase of a newly killed deer loves to pluck a wisp or two of the long rough hair that adorns the neck of a stag, or the winter jacket of a hind, and with this ragged lock in his hat band he may be seen for the next few months, or until the next opportunity occurs of replacing it with a fresh one. The workmen on certain farms have exceptional opportunities of assisting at the taking of deer, and inasmuch as a pair of wet legs is always handsomely rewarded, there is no little enthusiasm displayed when the hunted animal comes to his final stand still. While the chase is in full swing, one is often met with the anxious enquiry "Is he nearly run up!" and if the reply be in the affirmative tools are cast hastily aside and hobnailed boots go pounding down the waterside track to the accompaniment of much hard breathing and many a hoarse ejaculation. Then, when the weir pool is being lashed into foam, and the hounds are plunging in on all sides to the assistance of their luckier and more adventurous kennel mates that have been first to come to close grips with the stag, brawny arms are stretched through the leafy alder boughs, the brown many pointed horns are seized as they turn with some anxious movement of the mighty head, and with a heave and a shove and a lusty



THE COUP DE GRACE.

shout three full hundredweight of resisting venison are lifted up the muddy, slippery, dripping bank to the shelving green sward where the huntsman waits.

Sometimes a hard pressed stag will take refuge beneath the narrow span of some roadway bridge across a trout stream, and once within this shelter will prove a very awkward customer to handle, for to seize an angry stag in a place where there is no room to step back and avoid his charge is a very ticklish matter indeed, and the hounds moreover have far less opportunity of joining in and attracting the creature's attention just when the venturesome human is in most need of their assistance.

The Bristol Channel with its muddy waters and its high rising tides, its dense and frequent fogs, its shifting quicksands and its dangerous shores must ever figure largely in all narratives of staghunting in the west.

Just opposite red deer land, across the capricious and troubled waters of the wide estuary of the Severn, stand the tall chimneys of Cardiff and Newport with their glare of light at night and their drifting clouds of smoke by day. The Welsh hills presented a striking appearance on the Jubilee night of 1897, when every important peak from the Malvern beacon fires to Haldon sprang into

flame within ten minutes of the appointed hour of ten o'clock. Dunkery beacon was ready with its pile of duly prepared combustibles, and a steady southerly breeze drove great pillars of smoke and flame outwards towards the Severn sea, while some two hundred loyal folks joined hands in a gigantic ring round the burning bonfire and sang the National Anthem with great enthusiasm.

On the northern end of Dartmoor, and away across North Devon to the Isle of Lundy, a brooding cloud hid the beacon lights that should have shown full plainly from Dunkery's lofty top, but on all the rest of the wide circle of horizon, from which the daylight had only just departed, there were abundant fires to be noted and the locality of each assigned. Not only did the beacons of gallant little Wales seem to shine brightest, which may have been partly owing to the air being purer in that direction, but their number was actually larger in proportion to the area than of those to be seen on English soil, of which an immense extent was visible in the soft hazy twilight, from Mendip to Sidmouth Gap, and from Wincanton to Castle Hill. Opposite the Quantock range where deer go to sea, the tide is wont to go far out across the muddy flats, and the stag must trot far in shallow water before he can find depth enough to swim away

from the hounds, but in the wilder west, where the cliffs drop sheer to the rocky beach, deep water lies closer inshore, and three or four desperate bounds will carry him through the surf and into the deep heaving waves. Swimming low in the trough of the curling sea, a stag with a big head soon becomes difficult to keep in view, as the rise and fall of the water hides him completely, except when he is lifted on the top of some dancing roller.

The lifting of a heavy stag into an open boat even in a moderate sea, is a task which needs much skill and practice, but is frequently accomplished by the crew of the Porlock Weir boat. Certain spots in each of the rivers that drain the strongholds most affected by deer, see most of the finishes of runs that take place in their neighbourhood. When beaten deer take to a water of any size, their failing limbs naturally carry them down stream in their last efforts, and they are able to follow the river's course until they reach some obstacle, generally an artificial one, that brings them to a standstill and causes them to turn to bay.

Now in beating down the Horner Water, whether they come by way of the East Water stream or the main channel of the Horner Valley, deer come to the junction of the Horner Mill leat with the natural bed of the stream, and as it happens to lie a little further from the valley

roadway, and is moreover sheltered by bushes, it forms the more attractive course of the two. Beaten deer almost invariably take to the artificial channel, and for a time it leads them on in comparative safety, but while they splash along its cooling course the hounds run faster on the firm green bank above them, and force them further and further still, until they find themselves confronted with the old mill building, and in a trice are forced to pull up short or dash right over the terrible drop of the old mill wheel. Here on the wooden buckets they sometimes turn and confront their enemies, and a very awkward place it is in which to handle them.

Deer are very different in their readiness to fight the hounds, and also amongst themselves some appear to be much more ready fighters than others. Amongst the many battles which take place between the older stags in October it seems surprising that more fatalities do not occur, but few years pass without one or two stags or male deer being picked up dead or in a dying state at the time of the annual combats. Broken necks and injured backs are more generally the immediate causes of death than lacerated wounds from the points of the antlers, the force of the stag's charge being more deadly than the actual aim which he takes with the pointed weapons with which he is armed.

In striking at a hound the stag's object is evidently to pin him to the ground, and then to strike downwards at him with his antlers and transfix him when helpless. In goring a horse a stag cannot of course strike downwards, but lowers his head, so that the upward curve of his brow antlers may not prevent the points from coming into play. In striking at a man, a stag would doubtless try to bear him to the ground, and then transfix him after the manner of a hound, but fortunately such object lessons are seldom or never seen.

Deer will use their feet both fore and hind very cleverly when in difficulties, and will deal shrewd kicks and strokes at unexpected angles, bringing up a hind foot to dash away the hand that would seize their fore leg, or dealing out cow kicks with great force and rapidity, and the downward stroke of a cleft forefoot is a thing to be avoided.

With October and its wild nights and showery days the stag becomes wild in habit and appearance, and his gutteral melancholy voice is heard loudest on some stormy night when the sleet squalls are dashing across the hills and lashing the wooded combes that are lit up ever and anon with the fitful gleam of sheet lightning. Lying on her back the sickle moon lights up the dripping foliage with uncertain gleam as the storm passes by, roar

answers roar amongst the echoing tree stems, the great horns rattle and clash as the monarchs meet, and so the fight goes on as it has ever gone for thousands of years, in these self same combes, among the same oak woods, and on such wild autumnal nights. When day dawns, cold and shivering, the victor stag may be heard hoarse and weary but belling still, while his beaten rival has slunk away to some secure retreat, where he can nurse his wounds and his pride, until such time as he can find a smaller and feebler stag, and take his revenge and become himself a conqueror.

Stag venison carries more fat than that of hind or male deer, but is not so delicate, and yet at its prime in September forms the best roast of all three, especially when well hunted and brought to the board within three or four nights of its capture. After that the hunted flavour goes off, and it rather loses than gains even by the most careful keeping.

At the annual venison feast, at which the master entertains a goodly gathering of deer preserving farmers from each side of the country at Dulverton and Porlock, a smoking haunch is laid which has on some recent date been taken from a well run stag, and the giant joint resists sturdily the attack of from seventy to eighty healthy appetites. It has occasionally happened that when all the

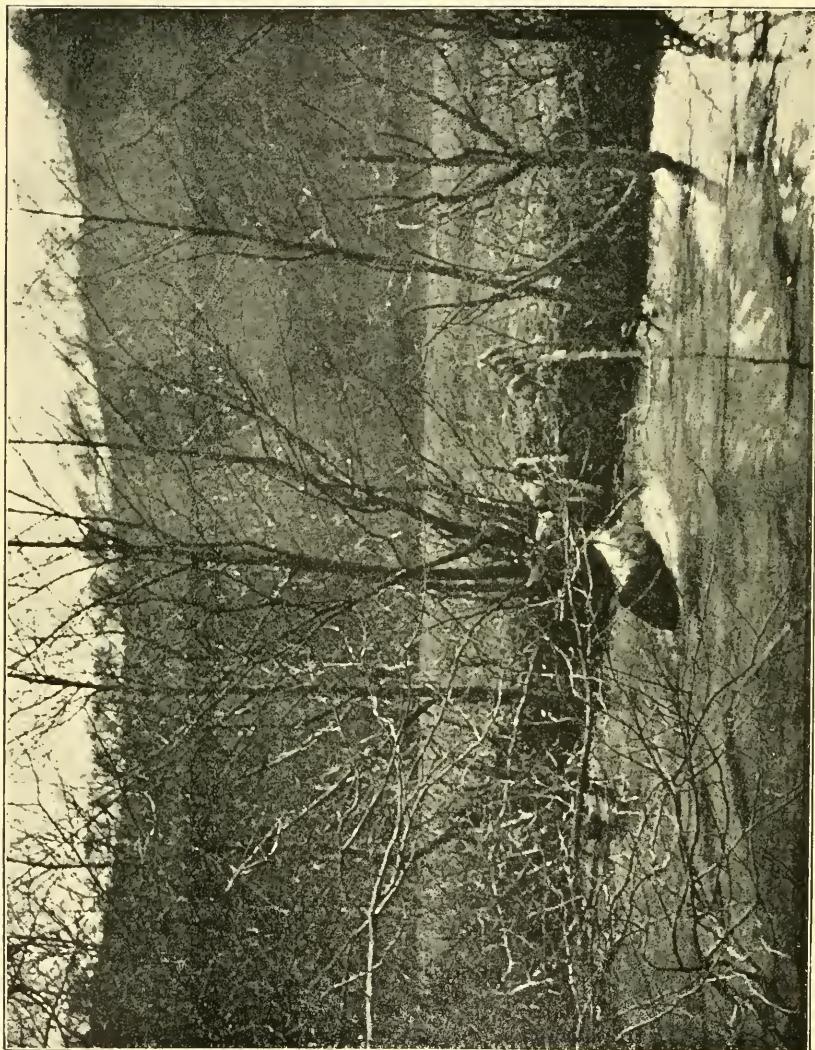
invitations for a venison feast have been duly sent out, hounds have failed to score a kill, and the appointed date has come nearer and nearer, whereon park venison has been ordered in haste, but it has generally come to pass that at the eleventh hour a stag has been duly taken.

When killed in the by-days at the end of July, or in the sweltering weeks of August before the velvet has begun to burnish, stag venison proves sometimes very difficult to keep, even for the few hours which are necessary for its distribution and delivery to the many out of the way and more or less inaccessible hill country farmsteads where its proper destiny lies. For the master's object in the distribution of all venison is to secure its safe arrival at the houses of those long suffering tenant farmers whose crops are always suffering more or less throughout the farmer's year from the hungry teeth of one of the most cunning and active of all wild animals. No ordinary fence is high enough or thick enough or sufficiently close woven to prevent the entrance of deer; a barricade of laced boughs on top of five feet of stone faced bank may give pause to a hungry stag or hind, but where there is a will with deer there is always a way sooner or later. The hinds and calves wriggle and twist beneath the strong beech stretchers, forcing their way with heads and necks until one slim foreleg is followed by another and there is made

room for the whole sinuous body, where first the nose could only penetrate, and then another deer follows and yet another, till in the murky blackness of the winter's night a struggling farmer's field is full of munching beasts, whose presence can be heard, but by no means seen. Hard worked and weary the farmer sleeps on the bed of feathers which his careful spouse has saved when the ducks were plucked for market, with the dim gleam of a low turned lamp beside his bed head, and wrestles in his dreams with the farthing that wool has dropped or the iniquitous rise of the poor rate.

The stag, with his branching head, cannot crawl through the gaps that suffice the hind, but he is a bold jumper and a clever climber, and if he once can crook one foreleg over the topmost binder, and gain a purchase with a hinder toe amongst the slippery stone work below, he will draw himself over to the coveted feast, and once inside amongst the turnips will do as much damage as half a dozen of his smaller kind. But perhaps the farmer's son, having noticed the first signs of these cervine visits to the treasured crop, may have crept out shivering in the frosty darkness, to disturb the nightly trespassers, and with a yell, breathless and discordant, rushes from a gateway right across the dripping rows of strongly smelling leaves. Up go the munching heads and long

A CRIPPLED DEER TAKES TO WATER IN THE BRAY.



graceful necks, a stamp follows from the forefoot of the oldest hind, a rush and a scurry to the adjoining fence, and then if it be stiff and blind and the drop beyond be deep and difficult a tragedy may happen. The crumbling bank top loosened by frost, occasionally gives way as the nimble feet tread lightly upon its slippery surface, one of the long slender limbs slips down perhaps between the tough beechen stretchers, there is a convulsive struggle and the beautiful animal hangs head downwards with a broken limb, imprisoned and helpless and marked for death. In the darkness the agriculturist plods his homeward way all unsuspecting of what has happened two or three hundred yards away in the inky blackness. Satisfied that he has driven the marauders from his father's crop for the night, he passes that way next day to note the ravages their teeth had caused, and at the fence spies the place where they ran and leaped to make their escape, and on looking at the yonder side sees that some great struggle has taken place. Patches of red brown fleck abound on the stones and sticks, the face of the bank is plastered with mud, beaten and flattened, but the crippled quadruped has dragged herself by this time into the depths of some leafy jungle far away. Here by good fortune the hounds may come at some near date and put

her out of her misery, or she may linger for many an agonised week to succumb to the hardships of winter, or again, and this is more frequently the case, she may part entirely with the broken end of the injured limb, and may recover in great measure her health and strength, or the fractured bone may set itself after nature's fashion, and may bear her weight remarkably well after a few short months, so that she may be able to hold her own with hounds, and even give a comparatively good run when at last she meets her fate. Many and many a deer has stood before hounds for an average length of time, that was never suspected to have had all the time a broken limb, until he or she was actually handled. These injuries account no doubt, for the curious uneven slots, and limping treads, that often meet the harbourer's eye when he is tracing deer to their lair.

The constant habit of following deer, leads many a dweller in the wild west country to be continually noting the hints which every state of the ground conveys in this much hunted country. Here the book of sport is laid wide open, for those who are skilled in it to study and learn and decipher as they go on their way with both eyes open, and some there are who can not only read, but can read as they run, or rather can follow along the

hard high road while at a hand canter, the print of the hunted animal before them, where hounds noses are of no avail. One of the last attainments of a finished staghunter, is the art of judging what stag is big enough or warrantable, under the different conditions in which deer present themselves to the eye in the hunting season. At other times of the year they often show themselves under much more favourable circumstances, both as regards distance and light, and they seem actually bolder and more careless of consequences when out of season, than in the three months preceding the middle of October. Deer vary so much in appearance, that of half a dozen warrantable individuals it is quite possible that no two may be good enough for the same reasons. A stag with magnificent length of flank and width of haunch, may carry a miserable head, although it is true that he will generally be well provided with horns if he is in good case as regards venison, and again the different positions in which deer are viewed cause them to bulk so differently that one may readily be deceived and give a wrong verdict. In looking down from a height upon a moving stag against the light green herbage of some strip of meadow in a valley, his size may seem altogether different from what it would appear if he were galloping broad-side on over a plain of dark heather at an equal level with the eye, or again a stag coming towards

one over the skyline in the eye of the sun, may seem light and narrow and undesirable, compared with the same animal going straight away from one between the tree stems of some endless wood. The trained eye, however, judges by many signs, and the verdict, though perhaps not strictly reasoned out, is seldom found wrong when given by one of the few who have the art of judging deer aright, and who moreover do not allow their wishes to be fathers to their thoughts. For the temptation is great to add a year or two to the age of a stag that is taking a desirable line, or has made his appearance at a time when sport has been ruling slow, and the afternoon is well on. At such times it is a lamentable fact that with many people every deer becomes a stag, and every stag a hunted one, and it is at such times that one cannot but admire the tact and equanimity with which a trained huntsman will receive and appraise at its true value a vast quantity of volunteered information.

The hunting field has its valuable lessons for those who have self restraint enough to benefit by them, and one of its plainest teachings is that of the duty to speak of nothing but what one has really seen oneself. The hunting of a twisting deer on a bad scenting day is a matter so extremely difficult that it must necessarily take many years of application to the science to even understand what takes place,

in the many moves between the wily animal running for its life and its adversary the huntsman. With the latter on such days it often becomes a matter of sheer dogged perseverance, of making good each possible direction in which the vanished quarry can have gone until at the last possible cast he is rewarded by the cheering sight of some keen nosed hound hitting off the lost foil. Even then it would seem as if an hour's start must secure the eventual escape of an animal with such powers of endurance as a wild red stag; but there is always of course one important factor in favour of the chase, and that is the stag's tendency to lie down after severe exertion, when he has reached some hiding place where he fancies himself secure. His rest too, if only he has been pressed sufficiently in the earlier part of the run always seems to have done him more harm than good, and his muscles, relaxed by long hours of midsummer ease and high feeding, are sure to stiffen while he waits for the fresh approach of the horn that has been making him uneasy ever since midday. Then too, with the dip of the sun towards the western horizon, scent suddenly alters as a rule, and from being faint and unreliable gains strength with each succeeding half hour.

Judged by his head alone, a deer may be said to be warrantable in many different ways,

but the chief test of age in the stag's head and the safest one to go by is the length of the brow antlers. If these be only long enough, whether they be thick and massive, or thin and pointed, the deer is sure to be an old one, no matter though the rest of him may be small and the surmounting beam be attenuated.

Occasionally deer have been killed with heads of three atop each side which were diminutive throughout, the deer themselves being small and probably far past their prime.

Long upright horns are not to be despised, as they are often carried by old deer of great weight, and inasmuch as they are deer which owing to their lack of points are likely to escape pursuit they should when identified be specially marked out as objects of the chase.

The same may be said of nott stags, on account of their liability to be mistaken for hinds, but once the eye has fully realised the action and gait peculiar to old and heavy stags, there is little fear of their being mistaken for their long necked consorts, except in difficult circumstances of light and distance. This one of distance occurs only too often, for warrantable deer are well aware of the danger of showing themselves for any longer period than they are absolutely obliged, and it is only when the tufter's attention become really pressing

that they betake themselves to the open hill, where their noble proportions stand revealed.

The majority of warrantable stags do not carry all their rights, and the movements of a startled deer are so quick and nervous, the turnings of his antlered head are so constant, and the ground he traverses is so rough, that it is difficult indeed, even to the most practised eye, to be positive as to the exact amount of points that he will prove to number at the end of the day. There are many points which the trained observer will note, and either of these when present is sufficient to convey as information to the master.

Three well defined points on either top, a square and well filled haunch, or long brow antlers, are any of them sufficient upon which to lay the information which shall lead forthwith to the unkennelling of the spangled pack and the sallying forth of the waiting field.

The seafront cliffs of North Hill, that divide the vale of Porlock from Minehead bay, are to the full as dangerous and unclimbable as the rocks of Culbone and Countisbury, and they are not so well provided with bushes and scrub to form foot and hand hold for the venturous hunter who would get down to the beach to see the last of a sea going stag. Zigzag paths have been engineered in places, but the action of time and weather, the heave

of the frost and the sweep of the midwinter wind have crumbled them, and every here and there they lead to impassable stone slides. The hill sheep, in their constant passing and repassing, wear them away, and they work out innumerable small recesses with their feet in which they may lie and obtain some small shelter from the stroke of the wind in cold weather and the attacks of tormenting flies in the summer solstice. These same shelters occur all over the hills, and are most easily made by the sheep in the peaty ground of the moor. To a horse that is not accustomed to the ways of hill sheep, it often proves alarming to have the little horned animals jump up out of the ground as it were, when he is in the midst of a stretching gallop over the heath and ferns. The flies that trouble the sheep worry the deer incessantly as well, and it is no uncommon sight to see a warrantable stag lying out on some bare hillside, far from the oaken thickets of his hiding place in the sweltering days of June in order that the passing breeze may give him some little respite from his ever attendant cloud of winged tormentors.

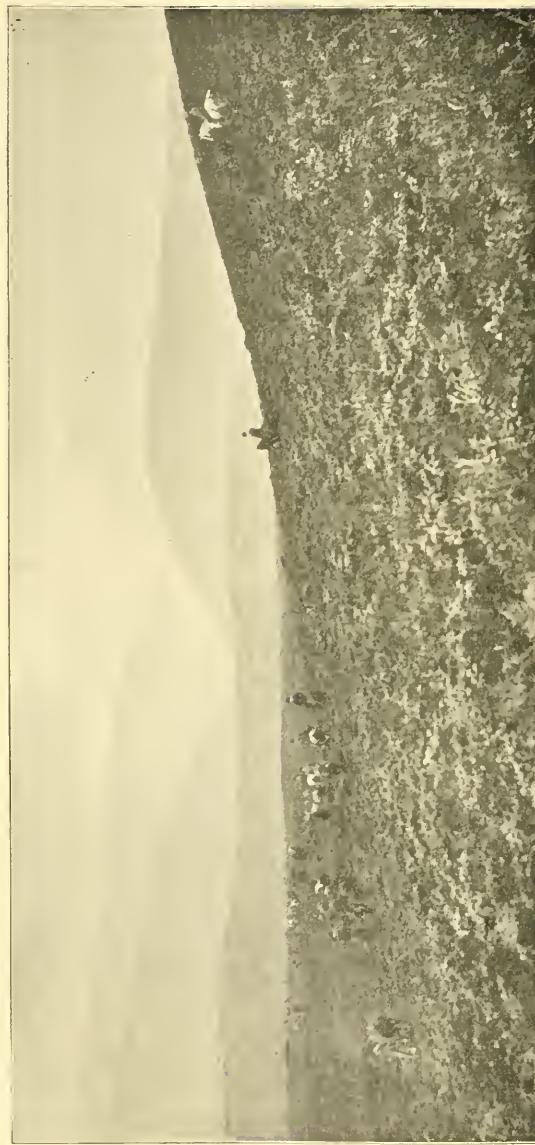
Lying back from Hurlstone Point the beautiful ilex wood of Selworthy clothes the slopes and shoulders of North Hill, and overhangs the fair domain of Holnicote. In

the bitter spring of 1895, when for nine weeks consecutively frost reigned supreme, this noble covert was sorely smitten, and for awhile turned brown. But the injury was not beyond the recuperative power of the trees, and with the lapse of time they resumed their normal appearance. This same frost was so severe as to destroy great quantities of gorse on the higher moors, and the death of the gorse enabled the whortleberry plant to flourish and increase in its place. This was apparently a great benefit, and the creeping furze which had been for many a year encroaching upon the ground that belonged to heather, was at last disposed of more effectively than it could have been by any artificial process. One unforeseen result, however, was that the young black game have had more opportunity than ever to glut themselves with the tempting fruit in the rainless days of August, when the springs and runnels of the higher moors have become entirely dry and the luscious berries afford a tempting food and drink combined. Large numbers of the young birds have succumbed under these circumstances, and the marked shrinkage of the general stock of this handsome game bird which has been noticed in all quarters of the moor in the last few years may very possibly be traced to this natural cause. North Hill is carpeted with a

superabundant growth of spiky furze and over this, as on Grabhist and Croydon, hounds have much ado to pick their way. Unlike fox and hare which follow the paths, the deer go straight across the prickly carpet, and the heavy dog hounds have trouble enough to find a spot on which to place their feet in comfort. Being nearer to the sea than such hilltops as Molland Moor or Winsford Hill, where much destruction was done, the gorse here survived the severe frost in great measure, while the tenderer ilex boughs hard by, shrivelled and lost their leaves.



FULL CRY OVER DUNKERY.



CHAPTER XI.

ON THE MOOR—UNKENNELING—KICKERS—OFF AT LAST—
THE SOUNDS OF THE CHASE—THE DEERPARK—THE
WATER SLIDE—AWKWARD PATHS—POINT TO POINT RACES.



In the balmy days of autumn when the breezy hilltops afford a delightful change from the dust and heated stones of any town however small and rural, the stag-hunting

world is ever eager to be on the moor, and not to be amongst the woods, and the further afield that they can find themselves upon the great wilderness of grass that lies between Alderman's Barrow and Tinerley the better they are pleased, until at least the hounds begin to run, and then there are wont to be frequent enquiries in varying tones of increasing anxiety for the nearest road to Minehead. Now the moor proper is a country without roads, except

those that radiate from Simonsbath, and they do not exactly serve for Minehead, whence the majority of staghunters come. Being all open going, with only occasional soft spots and uncrossable combes, the moor is practically all roads for the well mounted horseman, but a ten minute's scurry over the drainage gutters of the Chains or the North Forest seems to effect a wonderful change in the ideas of the majority of the field. To be actually on the Chains is the darling ambition of many a young lady whose first or second season on the moor has so far not brought her acquainted with this great green wilderness of swamps and gutters and lonely sheep pastures. If there be anything especially attractive in labouring over a swamp that is somewhat swamplier than the other swamps around, it may be enjoyed to the full on the heights of the Chains inclosure, which attracts the lion share of the rain that falls from the Atlantic clouds, as they sail majestically in to break where they first touch land. Rough and uncomfortable is the going on the wettest parts of Exmoor, and exceedingly exhausting even to the best of horses, and the traps and pitfalls are very numerous in places.

Where the sheep bite a horse can gallop; where there is heather, or heather mixed with grass he should be able to gallop too: where there are ferns there is sound going, but where

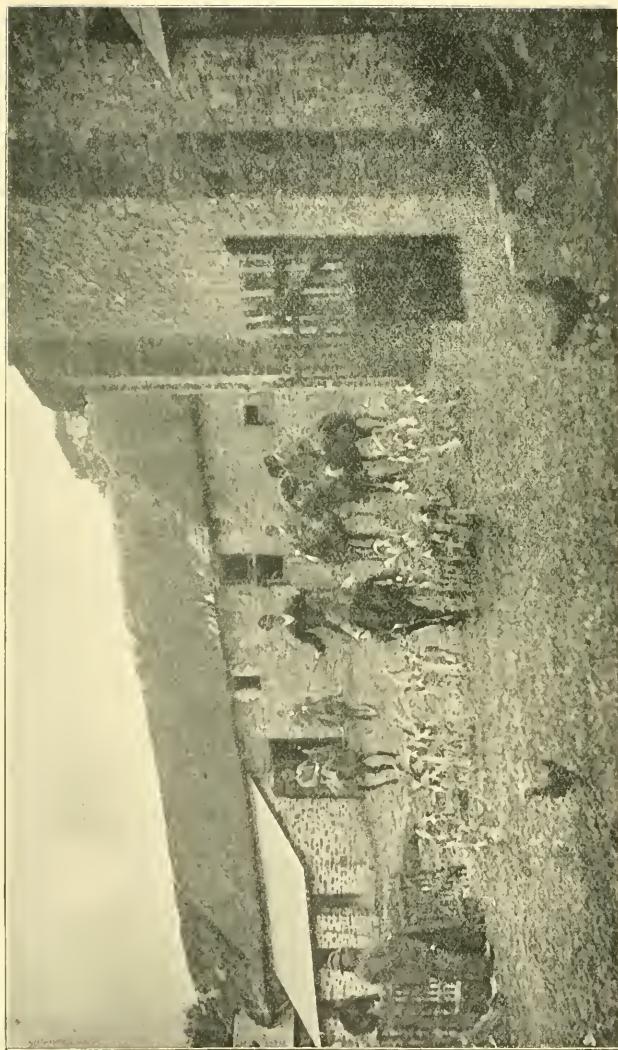
the surface is a dark and dismal green with grass a foot high it is time to go steady and collect your horse. Then comes a maze of ancient peat cuttings or an acre of natural swamp, and here time must be given, or the best horse ever foaled will be down on his knees and nose, and will have a struggle to regain his footing. After a prolonged tufting, and when fresh hounds have been taken out once or oftener to the huntsman's assistance, stray tufters are apt to turn up at odd times throughout the day's chase. Very possibly they may be running a deer on their own account, and often a blank day has been averted by the unexpected performance of some tufter that had been lost sight of for awhile, only to turn up with a warrantable deer before him, which he had been pursuing steadily all by himself from one retreat to another, through the deep green sylvan fastnesses whence he had at length stolen away to the open hill, only to find himself observed by the whole field, and a few minutes later to hear the whimpering scream of the pack as they open on his foil. In hind hunting and especially in rough weather when perhaps the greater part of the first draft of tufters have been lost, it is no uncommon practice to take out fresh hounds and ride to the nearest high ground, where before long some hunted hind is almost sure to heave in

sight, pursued by a plodding tufter or two through the drifting wreaths of wind swept rain. Thoroughly under control as the staghounds are, and well accustomed to being stopped over and over again in the course of a day's hunting, they will prove disobedient to the casual stranger, and after stopping for a moment will slip past his horse and continue their hunt rejoicing.

More often than not it proves impossible to get the whole pack back to kennel at the end of a day's hunting, but with an unerring instinct the great hounds, thanks to their careful summer training, seldom fail to retrace the weary miles to the kennel gates before morning. When new hounds come to Exford in the course of the summer reconstitution of the pack, they sometimes meet with adventures, and only as lately as the summer of 1901 a hound from the sale of the Hon. L. J. Bathurst's pack, on being let out by accident from Exford made her way in the course of one night to her old kennels at Eggesford.

A few seasons earlier a new hound escaped at Dulverton station and becoming quite uncatchable wandered about the country until he had to be shot. A familiar sight on all hunting days is that of the whipper-in returning towards the kennel to which the pack is for the time consigned with a few stray tufters following at his horse's heels. These have perhaps been

UNKENNELING AT LEY FARM.



stopped by him when in full pursuit of some other deer than the one selected for the day's chase. Cheerily he brings them back to the kennel door, opens it just wide enough to admit of their re-entrance, carefully keeping back the eager pack that press and struggle from within; panting and hot the tufters slip in at the narrowly opened door to be welcomed by the growls and envious whimpers of their comrades who are spoiling for a hunt.

The unkennelling of the pack always provides some exciting moments, horses and hounds alike are fresh and eager for the fray, and the field know that a warrantable beast is away, and that a run is to come off forthwith, and the great question of how to obtain a good start at the lay-on is uppermost in every mind. If a horse is a kicker, or has any form of vicious temper, it is sure to come out now, when after a long wait he finds himself in the midst of an excited multitude of his kind, with the master's horn ringing in his ears, and the scent and sound of the hounds just released from kennel close to him. Small wonder then, if inherited temper comes out, for his rider may be just as excited as himself, and the thoughts of the coming struggle may have turned his muscles to whipcord and set every limb a-tremble. The corn measure has been heaped up perhaps for weeks past and the gallant beast feels that he must arch his

back, snatch the reins from the trembling bridle hand that holds them, and give just one fling ere he settle down to the task which he knows is before him. 'Tis play to him, but it may be death to some one, horse or man. In crowded gateways and in narrow lanes there is no room for lashing heels or uplifted forehands. Sometimes the way is long and tedious to the spot where the tufters stand waiting: sometimes defective harbouring or the restlessness of a disturbed deer may make it necessary to move hounds and field as much as four or five miles from the trysting place, and the very fact that some meets have to be fixed as much as a fortnight beforehand naturally militates against an immediate find when the appointed day comes round, for there seems to be an irresistible temptation to go and look at or for a deer that is known to be destined for the morrow's sport, and again many deer move of their own accord, or in the height of the season hounds may very possibly run through their favourite haunt in pursuit of some other deer roused at a distance. Or again, if all has gone well and a right good stag has been found within short distance of the kennel, and has been got away without undue delay, then before midday, and while horses are still at their freshest and best, the cavalcade rattles out, the stony farm track is pounded by a thousand quickly striking hoofs, and the field,

well pleased, sets off in pursuit of the racing striving line on which all eyes are fixed. The breeze rushes in the ears and sets the coat tails flying, the huntsman's first cheer and the lively twanging of his horn, are succeeded by the fierce cry of the breathless hounds as they plunge over the deep but yielding heather, horses snort and blow, and their feet swish with measured galloping tread as they stride over the herbage and throw the miles behind them. Then the hounds swerve and the master's warning voice is heard upbraiding some too forward wing of the already warmed up field: then Slowboy or Woodman, Founder or Dreamer speaks to the foil again, and away go one and all in the same long swishing gallop, that continues all across the open moor, until some enclosure or a Forest stream is reached and a detour must perforce be made. Then there is a clatter on the rolling stones, a rattle and a scrape of iron on the rocks of the stream bed, a wallowing plunge as the great hounds dash through the shallow pools and race along the stickles where the muddy stain of the lately passed stag has hardly yet settled down or washed away amongst the circling eddies. All at once the hounds fling off upon the bank where some side combe, quiet and bracken bedded, and with a thorn bush or two or a straggling beech fence running down its steep

side at an angle to the water, and then when enough yards have been covered to allow of the water dripping from the quarry's flank and legs enough for the scent to resume its wonted power, a few eager notes and another cheer from the huntsman, and in a trice the horses, with their second wind gained, press briskly up the most convenient tracks that mount the opposing hill.

On the plain beyond there is grass that has been rendered splashy by recent rain: horses that have to gallop as soon as ever they reach the top of the steep and narrow path are soon puffing and blowing more loudly than before, while their tread has a squelching sound, and the water flings off the overladen herbage. At length a long stretch of oaken wood is reached that lies hot and airless in the full glare of the afternoon sun. Down its length for a full mile the stag has gone, and the cry that had such volume is now reduced to the sound of one or two of the oldest voices in the pack, that with deep and angry tone foretell the end that must soon and surely come. Down at last towards the inevitable water they incline, but before they reach it, that shrill ear-piercing yell arises with which all West Countrymen that are to the manner born give vent to their joyful feelings, when they see at length the object of all their strenuous exertions, and then for awhile the

welkin rings with a very carnival of sound. Heard from above, the sound that preponderates is the charge of the field up and down the nearest convenient roadway, the hounds are too breathless to make much music, except when the stag stands to bay for awhile in some fixed position; then the hammering on macadam stops, the tuneful peal wells up above the topmost branches of the oaks, the huntsman winds his horn to swell the chorus and the only quite silent being is the stag. To ride in a close packed string behind the pack for two or three miles along a dusty road is a very doubtful pleasure, but to accompany hounds across the moor when they emerge from Badgworthy Cottage to go towards Hoar-Oak or Black-pits is a nice ride in itself.

If it be the master's day as huntsman, it will very likely be the field master who unkennels the pack and takes them out, with a second horseman acting for the nonce as whipper-in until the scene of action is reached.

All the old hounds know full well what is expected of them, and hurry on in close order, only wishing to strike the foil at once, and get clear of the line of thundering hoofs behind them, with which they are always threatened at the beginning of a run. If the moor be dry its surface gives out a plainly audible sound when galloped over by a number of horses, and this

oncoming pounding sound must be very trying to a nervous hound when he has for the moment lost the line and scent fails him.

Deer do not like the company of stock of any sort ; sheep, cattle and ponies all interfere with their comfort, disturb their midday repose and crop the pasturage with which they would have to be satisfied if the farmers tilled no succulent crops within their reach. The Oare Deerpark is a striking example of all that is most suitable for wild red deer, absolute quiet and abundant warm lying, joined with sufficient snug covert amongst the young larches with which the combes have been planted, and within easy reach lie half a score of farms which they can visit in turn when the crops reach the point preferred by their fastidious taste. Fenced on all sides, it can be entered by none of the moor ponies or sheep which range over the commons and allotments on all sides, and right out in the middle of its smiling plain can be seen at almost any time of the year its herd of deer.

Here the spotted calves lie out amongst the rank growth all through the dreamy days of June and thundery July, or follow their dams through the green shelter of the larches, with their avenues of grey lichenized stems, down to the banks of Badgworthy Water to see their first soiling pit in full use as a mud bath. Here at

Michaelmas, and for some three weeks afterwards, the combes resound in the chill frosty nights with the angry roar of belling stags, that may be harboured by sound of their voices alone, if only they will stay where their last morning challenge is given until hounds have time to come to the spot.

They are so restless, however, at this season of the year, that they often move about throughout the entire day as well as night, and any woodland they have inhabited for a few hours becomes printed all over with the slot of their uneasy wanderings. In the tourist season the Deerpark herd look down with easy unconcern upon the many parties and couples that wend their way from Malsmead Bridge, past Lorna's Bower and the water slide to the Doone Valley. Blackmore's beautiful romance has given a never-failing popularity to the valley where he located his well-told legend, painting together into one attractive whole several of the more striking pieces of the surrounding scenery.

Excellently contrived as the Deerpark is as a natural habitat for various kinds of wild game, it has been brought to its present state of perfection by succeeding generations of sportsmen, who have made it by degrees the natural sanctuary that it is by fencing and preservation. There is hardly a living deer above twelve months of age that stands within ten miles of

Badgworthy Cottage, but knows its way to the Deerpark inclosure, excepting perhaps the denizens of Winsford Hill or the Minehead coverts, and very little pressing is required to send a Brayford stag, or one from Wistland Pound, across the southern or western heights of the moor, to take refuge amongst the numerous herd always to be found in the sanctuary. Every here and there the feet of the combes that debouch on Badgworthy Water are guarded by small rocky kopjes, and the one at the bottom of Lankcombe facing the main Deerpark plantation is crowned with oaken coppice. Few scenes are more romantic than the narrow green glade between this natural tumulus and the fringe of Badgworthy Wood, with its scrubby growth untrimmed by the hand of man. Here the bright, quickly moving figures of the chase find an appropriate setting amongst the tall banks of heath, with rocks and coppice and a tumbling stream that falls from pool to pool towards the Water Slide, where a rustic foot bridge enables pedestrians to cross dry shod while the hunting path goes through the limpid stream.

Happy is the huntsman who has got his stag well away up the line of Lankcombe, if he has only frightened him enough to ensure that he shall not return to his comrades in the Deer-park, but will go away forthwith to Farley Water or Brendon Two Gates. Then there is almost

A KILL IN THE DOONE VALLEY.



bound to be a run and a good one, though many difficulties may intervene; there may be checks amongst fresh deer and checks at the Forest streams, that thread every combe until Sir Henry Carew's plantations at Woolhanger are reached, or again, and more likely still, the stag may swing round by Larkbarrow bog to Hurdle Down and Horner, or may even make the ring more complete still and gain Culbone by way of Hawkcombe Head. But in either of these cases a huntsman will have had a good chance to pit his hounds' endurance against the stag's speed and length of limb, and that over many miles of the best possible scenting ground.

Badgworthy Water is the biggest, as it is also the best known, of all the Forest streams, and below its junction with the Oare Water is known as the East Lyn, under which name it foams and tumbles down its rocky channel through the Brendon Valley, the gorge growing wilder and wilder as it proceeds, until at Watersmeet it is joined by the other Forest streams, flowing in one, that have come down from the heights of the Chains, always excepting those that flow further westward still, combine to constitute the West Lyn, and join in in Lyndale. When hunted deer betake themselves to the Lynmouth and Countisbury coverts, it is a hard task indeed to follow them, so precipitous and so unpathed are the wooded cliffs that

overhang the East Lyn. To get about them at all on horseback is a large order, but to have to do so towards the end of a really magnificent run with horses done to a turn, was what befel in the course of the greatest run of half a century from Hawkridge in 1899. Then it became necessary to follow the course of the East Lyn upwards from Watersmeet, and in so doing a place was soon encountered, where the path beside the torrent had slipped away until there remained nothing but the narrowest of sheep paths. Some of the field crossed this dangerous pass in safety, while others elected to ride up the bed of the river itself, a mass of fallen and jagged boulders, but fortunately not covered at the time by any great depth of water. Then ensued a particularly heart-breaking climb to the heights of Countisbury Common, and no sooner had half a mile of this been traversed than more nerve-shaking paths were encountered along the cliffs by Desolate and Wingate Wood, till the garden walks of Glenthorne were reached, and horses were once again on safe ground, though with a climb of a full thousand feet between them and the road they all must reach at County Gate.

The North Forest is a tract like the Chains, whereon the average staghunter sometimes finds himself, and when he does he cannot help being aware of it, so swampy is the going in

many parts if rain has lately fallen, so frequent are the gutters and the peat cuttings and the undermined water courses.

So undisturbed is this wide tract of Lord Ebrington's territory, that a herd of stags will often lie for weeks together amongst the grass and rushes of the silent wildernesses of Lanacombe and Buscombe, Trout Hill and Pinford Bog, sallying forth to The Warren farm to regale themselves at night with juicy rape and ripening corn, or even to pull down and scatter the oaten sheaves of a late harvest. It was across a part of this district, on a course over Dry Hill and so round over Swap Hill to Larkbarrow, that Mr. Sanders instituted some highly successful point to point races, the winning post being near the back of Larkburrow. Casualties however were somewhat plentiful owing to the rough and somewhat holding nature of the ground, and the course has been changed for a safer one near Hawkcombe Head. With the sound ground of Manor Allotment and Badgworthy Leas immediately adjoining and overlooking this great tract of soft ground, there is abundant opportunity of avoiding the difficulties of a course across it, and a considerable section of the field as a rule do not set foot on its green expanse. Sometimes however, as in a certain well remembered run from Hawkcombe Head, hounds may turn due south across the

centre of Pinford Bog, and traversing the Warren Combe, may leave the trickling stream of the Exe behind, and all those who are not really following them lamenting for the rest of the day. On that occasion two stags were before hounds, and one of them, the one that was not followed, shaped his course for Landacre and Molland Moor, while the other was eventually taken after a hot and punishing chase at Luc-combe Allers.





ASHLEY COMBE.

CHAPTER XII.

CULBONE PLAIN—THE DEER FENCE—DEVICES FOR PROTECTING CROPS AND DEER—NIGHT WATCHING—THE TIVERTON STAGHOUNDS—THE QUANTOCK STAGHOUNDS—THE BARNSTAPLE COUNTRY—THE STOWEY ROAD—THE CHASE ON THE QUANTOCKS—OVER THE CLIFFS—“TRUGG” RICH—THE WATCHET HIND.



OF all the wind swept weather beaten heights, where staghunters from time to time shiver and wait while the tufters wrestle with unwilling stags, the posting stables at Yarnor Moor Lodge remain the most clearly fixed in the mental eye amongst many memories of physical discomforts. Crushed and chilled out of existence

by the force of the wind, the stunted fir trees, dwarfed like the productions of Japanese art, add no inches to their stature with the flight of years. Nine months winter and three months cold weather is said with some truth to compose the climate of Exford, and on Culbone Plain when it is cold it is very, very cold, and when it is hot the Lynton coach road grinds to a dusty track of flint and powdery sand, while the flies of the thickly grown combes are about the most venomous and innumerable of all that swarm on Exmoor. Redolent of turpentine, the low tangled growth of pine boughs scents the whole hill, save where a burnt breadth presents a clearing, and through the resinous thickets hounds can never make the pace. Well worn hunting paths run in all directions, and from those on the seaward front, noble views of the Bristol Channel and the Welsh coast present themselves.

The tall deer fence erected by the Earl of Lovelace, to protect his Culbone farms from the ravages of the deer, consists of wire sheep netting some five feet in height, erected on the top of the old stone faced sheep fence that bounds the lower edge of the plantations, and is stoutly staked with larch poles all the way. Starting from Ashley Combe, it follows the fold of the ground upwards to Pitt Farm, and then turns away to the Yarnor drive and so follows

an undulating course, traversing combe after combe, until at the Broomstreet fields it abuts on the county road between Porlock and Lynton. At Yenworthy Common it is continued on the Glenthorne estate so as to protect Yenworthy farm, but in spite of its long extent and formidable height, numerous deer manage to find their way within its confines, some no doubt negotiating the fence at weak spots, while the majority find their way round its western extremity, and work through the cliff woodlands until they reach cultivated land. On wild winter days, when the high ground of the moor is unrideable, these cliff deer often provide occupation for the hounds, and keep the boat on the *qui vive*. With the softening influence of the sea close at hand, and amongst the warm shelter of the oaks of Culbone and the pines of Ashley Combe, the cliff paths rarely freeze, and snow hardly ever lies, except when driven straight on shore by a northerly squall. While hinds and young deer chiefly affect the purlieus of Smallacombe and Stent hill, the stags chiefly inhabit Lillycombe, another favourite woodcock covert, and the healthy plain of Beggars Knap, or seclude themselves in Silcombe and Titchen Combe, or amongst the larch thickets, scarcely higher than a man's head, at the Broomstreet end of Culbone Plain.

In their present condition the plantations

offer a sanctuary for deer so secure, that they have much the best of the contest when followed by hounds, and they are not slow to avail themselves of the odds in their favour afforded them by the low sweet-smelling boughs.

On either side of the dusty main road the remains of strained wire fences lie snake-like in rusty coils amid the luxuriant growth, and render it difficult to negotiate the roadside banks, in fact it may be said that none of the moorland banks can be safely leapt without previous knowledge, owing to the large amount of wire used in former days for sheep fences.

The jumping powers of the moorland sheep are well known, and nothing short of a stone faced bank six feet high, with an overhanging coping or a strained wire to surmount all, has the slightest effect in keeping them within bounds. Moreover where the deer go first the sheep are sure to follow, until a well established rack by long usage wears down the whole fence to ground level. When deer are attacking some toothsome crop, if they find the fence easy to get over they will often restrict themselves to one or two racks, but should it be high and difficult, or should the farmer endeavour to save for himself some portion of the crop wrested from the thin soil by the sweat of his brow, by stopping the rack with thorns or otherwise, then the deer will choose new crossing places, and if

there should be a few wet nights in succession, when a large herd of heavy and hungry deer is foraging, the trim line of the farmer's hedge will soon be seamed all over with muddy gaps that will take much labour to repair, and will call down plentiful abuse on the offending heads of the midnight marauders. Many are the devices by which deer may be checked in their first attempt on forbidden sweets. Tarred cord is frequently stretched along the whole length of the hedge which they have begun to traverse, figures fearful and wondrous, surmounted by green and rusty hats, are mounted in prominent positions, lanterns covered with green and red paper are set swaying and dangling in lonely turnip fields, and strong smelling deterrents such as pigs' blood are sometimes effective. When once however gnawing hunger, and the contempt that comes with familiarity, have made the deer bold enough, as they speedily do in the long dark nights of winter, no artifice will long avail to keep the starving herd from the tempting food which they can smell from afar. Spring guns may terrify them for awhile, chained dogs may protect a small area in the immediate neighbourhood of the draughty barrel where they shiver through the night, and clattering windmills may make them pause in their advance from the shady boughs of the nearest covert, but somehow or other,

and if not in one field then in the next, they will have their fill, and that of the best which the neighbourhood affords.

Night watching, if efficiently carried out, will thwart their attack, but the difficulty of keeping body and soul together for many mid-winter nights in succession on the exposed heights where the deer mostly feed is too great for the endurance of the average watcher, and after a while he more often than not cannily goes home to bed. The eerie loneliness of such a vigil must be tried to be appreciated.

The near neighbourhood of the deer is more generally heard than seen, as they rush through the wet turnip leaves at the near approach of the shivering guardian of the crop. A stick cracks at the fence and the boughs quiver and rustle against the gloomy sky, which is only one degree lighter than the slumbering earth. Presently a hailstorm patters and rattles, as it sweeps across from hill to hill, drenching and chilling all nature in its course, bowing the broad turnip leaves with added moisture, and setting the hedges dripping, while each cart rut runs with ice cold water. Or again, a frosty moon perhaps has just set beneath the western horizon, and by the bright starlight the watcher sees a long line of grey white forms, trooping silently across the crop he has been set to guard, until they come to the part which is

sweetest and most luxuriant. Down go their long grey muzzles to begin the tempting meal, and in a moment the munching bite of their keen cutting teeth can be heard all over the field. Then from the shadow where he leant against the bank, the farmer's deputy leaps out with a shrill whoop that puts consternation into every cervine brain. Away go *péle mêle*, these nocturnal pillagers, and in less time than it takes to tell, they have put half a mile between themselves and their spoilt dinner. Back to his ambush goes the watcher, and the warmth engendered by his little chase dies slowly out of him, while the frosty rime settles thick and white on every rigid bough and frozen leaf. A shooting star careers across the sky, and at last the deer, bold and hungry, come trooping back to complete the interrupted feast. First one great antlered head and then another surmounts the slippery bank, and stands out clearly defined against the starlit sky, the great ears flap enquiringly, timidly, doubtingly. Then some movement of the frosty vapour floats a whiff of scent from the hidden human being to the sensitive nostrils, that are questioning the air with every breath. With alarm the deer swing round, and are gone to return no more that night.

The Culbone deer fence has turned many a deer to seek his nightly meal in the Oare

valley, which is also attacked on the opposite side by the Deerpark herd, and straggling bands of deer from all parts of the moor, but its general effect on the sport has been beneficial.

The Devon and Somerset is a hunt much affected by the gentler sex, of which a large part of the field is composed during the fine weather months. Long and tiring as the days frequently are, and rough as is the ground to be traversed, many ladies go extremely well with the staghounds, and in the longest and fastest chases some of them are sure to be up at the finish.

The rapid growth of everything connected with the sport has had its outward and most visible sign in the tendency to multiply the packs that do the work. The successful initiation of Sir John Heathcoat Amory's pack has led to an establishment on the Quantock Hills, where the lines laid down for the regulation of the Tiverton Hunt have been followed in almost every particular. Whereas in former days the Devon and Somerset Hunt Committee was the only authority as regarded the deer and their welfare, wider interests are now involved by the establishment of each separate pack. The preservation of each herd has become a matter of still more widely spread interest, and has become thereby more firmly

MOUNTSEY HILL GATE.



established, and the matter of compensation to farmers, an affair of growing importance, has been decentralised with the best results.

As time passes it may confidently be predicted that the Barnstaple district will not be satisfied without the establishment of a pack on similar lines to those already carried out with such success. Suitable coverts, and a noble herd of deer in close proximity to the heights of Exmoor, afford such certainty of good sport as can never long be allowed to remain idle. The history of stag-hunting contains many instances of individual landowners exhibiting animosity to the chase which brings health to some and affluence to others of their neighbours, but public opinion and the welfare of the many have sufficient influence and weight in modern England to ensure the ultimate victory of the will of the many over the prejudices of the few. The time for arbitrary exercise of even the most ordinary rights and privileges is passing fast into the limbo of other long forgotten feudal habits, but old world ways and customs linger still among the hills and fogs of Exmoor, along with the cheery courtesy and pleasant welcome which might better be preserved than some of the rough and ready old-world customs that have prevailed since times before all history.

The Quantock pack meets with a well-defined boundary in the line of the West

Somerset Railway, which cuts them off from the home country of the Devon and Somerset, much in the same manner that the line of the Taunton to Barnstaple railway marks the northern boundary of the Tiverton pack. In the case of each pack local provision is made for the compensation and settlement of deer damage claims arising within the country lent them, and neither pack employing professional huntsmen, subscriptions are only taken for the purpose of defraying such claims. When hunting by invitation in the home country, the field turning out with either pack are under obligation to subscribe to the funds of the Exford establishment as though they were hunting with the original pack.

While the Tiverton country is a great deal too narrow, and its herd a great deal too thin in point of numbers, for the regular exercise of a two day a week pack, the Quantock Hills with their numerous herd present far more scope for a local hunt, which should be able to retain within its borders ample material for its own requirements.

At Barnstaple, however, there is hardly room for the maintenance of a sufficiently large herd to stand regular hunting from season to season, and the lie of the land hardly admits of many days being given by invitation to a pack on the western border of the moor itself. Here

again a railway forms an effective line of demarcation between a local pack and the Exford country, so that the Devon and Somerset territory is now contained in an irregular parallelogram, marked out by three railways and the coast line of the Severn Sea.

Quantock deer make their headquarters chiefly within a mile or so of the Stowey road, and amongst the extensive plantations of Bagborough. When they wander further afield, they find warm lying and security in the wooded combes towards St. Audries, or among the Cothelestone or Buncombe Hill coverts. Long periods of tranquility have always tended to make the deer herd together in their favourite combes, whereas continued hunting scatters them into remoter hiding places, and the establishment of the Quantock pack should tend to spread them far and wide into every available woodland from Fairfield to Kingscliff.

The Stowey road is a rubicon over which deer sometimes return in safety, but more often if the stag be a heavy one, and well tufted withal, his doom is sealed when once he has set his nose for St. Audries, and has left the dusty line of the hilltop road behind him, where his friends the Stowey broomsquires are always waiting on fine hunting days to greet his appearance from the depths of Ramscombe or the recesses of Govett's Copse, and to send

him on his way with quickened bounds and head held high in alarm.

On the slopes that overhang the fair vale of Stowey, a peculiarly tough and tangled growth of stunted oak copse clothes the shoulders of the hill, and is known as Great Customs. Here the Stowey villagers have ancient rights, and here the deer cross by preference from Govett's Copse to Danesborough, knowing that they will be less exposed to view than in crossing the open heath on the hilltop, and the ascent from Seven Wells is also less exhausting.

A stag that takes a line low down in Great Customs, is sure to seek shelter in the quiet depths of Shervedge Wood, which forms part of the Dunster Castle estate. Here he will invariably wait for hounds, while soiling in the black and peaty pit within the shade of the coppice, and then as he hears his enemies approaching, will steal away over the heathy shoulder of Woodlands Hill, to sink into the depths of Butterfly Combe, indulging perhaps in a hasty roll in Hayman's Pond.

Even as the cool wave laves his broad loin, the whimpering cry that he has already learned to dread, comes again on his quivering ear, as the leading couples come striding over the sun-baked brow above him, and come plunging down towards him by the self same track he followed through the fern and coppice, over the

gorse and rolling stones. The hills are already crowned with lines of mounted figures, the deep mouthed older hounds follow fast on the heels of their speedier kennel mates that lead the van, the great stag bounds with a sigh and a splash from his grateful rest, steals nimbly away to the lower end of Hareknaps, and so strides over the sheep walks and the stunted gorse into Holford Combe. Up it he goes with a bold heart, but a heaving flank. All the world seems to be watching him to-day, and every hill top has its eager human beings, all agog to spy his movements. Up the stony stream bed he gallops with steady strength, and between the overhanging banks finds presently a pool that no human eye can mark. Another splash and another delicious roll, a gulping hasty drink and away he goes, for again he hears them coming. All up the stream bed, in and out by the green sward patches, and then right up the bridle path that follows the winding course of the trickling stream, till the top is nearly reached. Here a little side combe, hot and glowing in the afternoon sun leads him in the direction he would go, and he trots up its fold, startling the pony brood mares and their foals by his panting breath, and as he gains the summit turns and looks round with hot and angry eye on the unwonted aspect of his native hill. The erstwhile peaceful valley he has left behind now rings with melody, which to him is no melody at all, and on every side, as far

back as even his piercing vision can reach, horsemen are coming fast to converge upon his line of flight. He now plainly sees himself in danger, and regretting vainly that he ever left the big Quantock woodlands behind him, or that he ever crossed the Stowey Road, resumes his lurching gallop and puts the skyline between himself and danger. The sea breeze fans his heated cheek and flank, as with prickly gorse beneath his feet he sinks to Erridge Combe, where water is hard to find. Without waiting, he passes on all round the long slopes of West Hill, smelling the salt sea more plainly with every long laboured stride. Now he knows what he must do, he must play his trump card and gain that wide sea below, for there he feels certain he can easily distance the fleetest hound that ever walked out from Bagborough. On the furzy ground sheep and ponies are grazing, and far ahead against the sunlight he espies a long black line, that runs all down the slope, the iron rails of the St. Audries fence. Right across to it he goes, as he has often done before by moonlight, to exchange compliments with the deer within, but as he nears it now it looks higher and stiffer than it ever did before, and a passing thought of leaping it is relinquished at once. With lowered head, and quickly panting breath he trots down beside its long black length, and presently

A CHECK.



comes to a wide dusty road, quite pink in colour. In some of the fields below there are people at work, cattle are grazing here and there, and some geese screaming loudly in a farmyard far away. From the road he finds an easy place to rack into the field below, and all goes fairly well for a field or two, till a sheep dog espies him, and with yapping bark gives chase. Now he must make an effort, for the cur is swift of foot, and his gleaming teeth come nearer and nearer quickly. See here is a strongly made elm fence, laid and strongly made last winter, with the ditch dug deeply out, and the clods thrown squarely up to raise the bank. A quickened stride and an upward heave, a crackle of dry sticks as the four nimble feet touch lightly on the summit, and with the same his impetus has carried him well out into the next field. Such a leap distances the sheep-dog for a few breathless seconds, but he knows his ground, and ere the stag has crossed the next wide pasture, he has slipped through the gateway, and caught up this strange invader of his master's fields. Heading him off with the speed of a greyhound, he dashes at his muzzle, but in the same instant he becomes aware that he has a fighting foe well armed and ready to use his weapons. This alters the look of things entirely, and he sheers off for a few short yards, while the mighty stag, blown and panting, turns at

the next hedgerow, and stands to confront his unwelcome follower. Meanwhile the farm labourers hear "Ship" giving tongue, and their view holloas reach the huntsman's ear as he follows his pack beside the deerpark railings where the stag came down. Full well he knows that welcome sound which foretells the successful ending of his day's work. His practised eye glances far ahead, forwards and downwards to the green fields beneath the road, that lies spread out like a map, with the running figures of the workmen, the sheep-dog a brown dot, and the cornered stag, a larger splash of red beside the hedgerow. Just then the stag charges at the dog, just as the lusty sons of toil come running through the open gateway. The dog flies yelping and the stag turns to an easy gap, to clear it with deliberate stride, and so gallop down to the cliffs that face the sea. Now the cliffs just here are high, and at foot are perpendicular, but the stag having got out of sight of all pursuers, thinks he can find a satisfactory hiding place by walking a little way down over the steep earthy slope where the fields break off and the cliffs begin. At first he finds fair foothold and his cloven feet grip the weather worn marl quite well. But as he goes on, and turns the first corner, the ground becomes more crumbling and treacherous and slopes at a steeper angle.

Here frost and rain, wind and sunshine have done their work, and turned to powder the clay and lias, which the waves have long ago worn down to their present conformation.

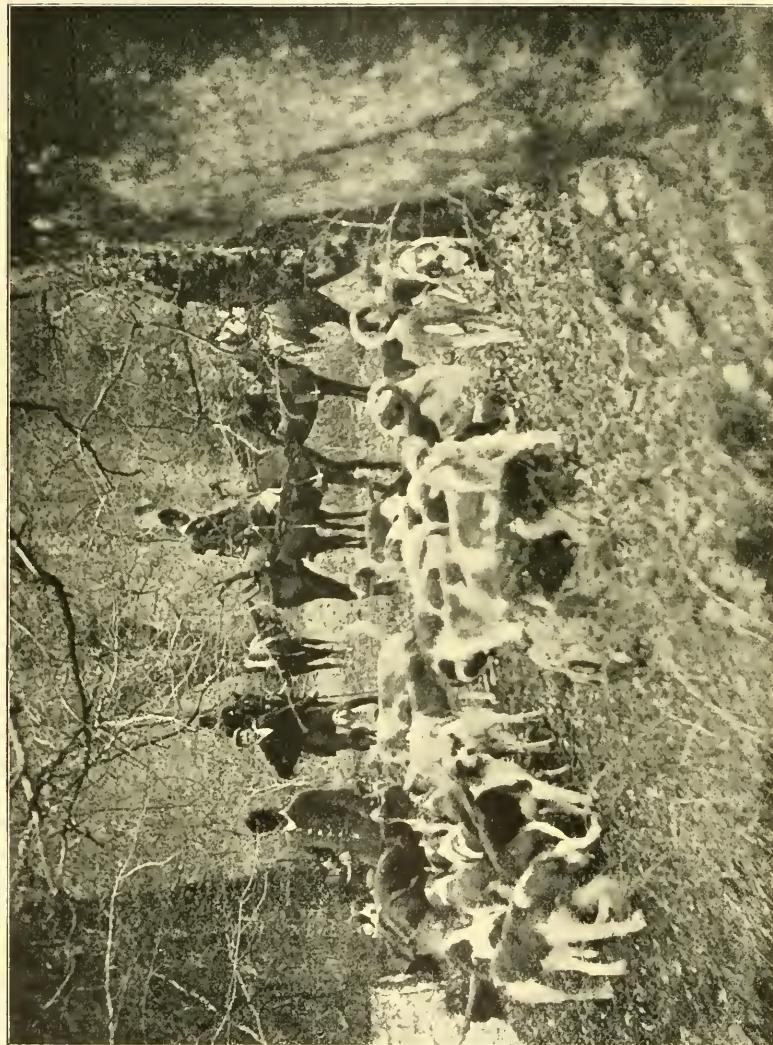
All below him is sheer and sudden death: in front and beyond him on the crest some thirty feet above a scarlet coated figure suddenly appears looking down upon him: he turns, his foothold gives, everything slides and rushes: the rocks leap up to meet him, and he drops head foremost with one gasp to instant death.

Meanwhile from afar there has been following the chase by green and bumpy hill tracks, by lanes and roads and accommodation farmways a long, low broomsquire's cart which presently finds a way down to the rocky beach, and with all that remains of a gallant stag on board, returns laboriously to the hard high road, by which to convey the venison to such destiny as the master shall appoint. "Trugg" Rich is the owner of the Quantock venison cart; and with unfailing skill has contrived for many years to be up at the death or soon after whenever hounds have set up their deer. He has carted as many as three dead deer at once, and has followed some notable runs, often arriving at the finish as quickly as the field. Many a passenger has "Trugg" had upon the somewhat insecure bench that does duty for a seat on his vehicle, and if one be young and active

and not affected by jolting, and if one would see a run without riding on horseback, there is no better plan on the Quantocks than to entrust oneself to William Rich's care; for whatever else may happen, he and his much enduring pony and his very useful cart will bring the deer home, no matter which way he or she will run, or how long or crooked the chase may be. "Trugg's" vehicle has been often copied, and Stowey carts may be seen on other hills besides the Quantocks, and they will get over surprisingly rough ground without coming to grief. When they do turn over amongst the deep ruts or weather worn hill tracks, they are easily righted again, but a quiet pony, staunch in collar and decidedly sure-footed, is necessary to enable the charioteer to wrestle successfully with the by-ways of such rough country as the Quantock Hills. The story goes that "Trugg" was much agitated when he first heard that a facsimile of his vehicle was to be made for, and driven by, a lady of title living in the neighbourhood of the Quantocks, and that he at once made an expedition to ascertain at first hand whether there was to be competition for his hitherto uncontested office of venison carrier, feeling greatly relieved when told that his monopoly was not to be invaded.

Deer from the Quantocks sometimes run as far as the estuary of the river Parret, where by reason

"TRUGG" WILL SOON BE HERE.



of extensive mudbanks and shifting quicksands, they are sometimes very hard to secure, even when drowned by the hounds. The fishermen's boats from Steart and Combwich are not always at hand when wanted, and the particularly high tides which occur on this coast run with great force up the river to Bridgewater, or return with a rush that is apt to carry the strongest rower or swimmer far down stream.

In the Spring of 1900 a hind crossed the water near Black Rock and was pulled down by the hounds amid the mud flats adjoining the Pawlett Hams. The present master of the Wells Harriers, divesting himself of his hunting coat, volunteered to swim across the ebbing tide, and after a very muddy landing secured the hind and brought her back to the Otterhampton bank. The flat bottomed boats which are used on this coast are of a singular shape which has been found exactly suitable to the circumstances with which they have to cope. With raised ends, after the manner of a cocked hat, they have a flat floor, on which a three-legged stool not unfrequently does duty for a thwart. With a stiff short mast and a lug sail these boats will tack remarkably close to the wind, heeling over so as to make the angle between their flat bottoms and raised sides take the place of the keel in an ordinary boat. In running before the wind they will glide over

a choppy sea in most approved fashion, and amongst rocks will behave quite as well as a boat of ordinary make.

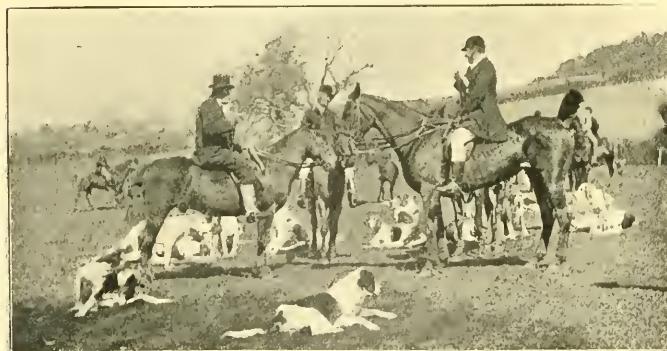
On another occasion a hind was driven from the Quantocks in Mr. Bassett's mastership and obtained a start of two hours on her pursuers, she was sufficiently frightened, however, to cross the Stowey Vale, and carry on by Fiddington and Knaplock to Hill House. Here she sank to the marshes of the Steart level, and taking to the Parret near the Powderhouse, swam far and fast down stream, until she found herself amongst the quicksands off Steart village, and felt inclined to come ashore. A bitterly cold north west wind was blowing and a baker's cart, turned round with its back to the gale, was made to do duty as a shelter for two individuals who kept watch on her through a glazed peephole at the back, until she came ashore. A Scotch deerhound had by this time arrived upon the scene, and made a dash at her from the muddy foreshore, but tired though she was, the nature of the ground was in her favour and she escaped the rush of the long legged hound.

A pack of harriers had also been sent for, but when they arrived the hounds also put in an appearance, and then a very short scurry brought the hind to a standstill in the nearest rhine, behind the pebble beach which protects

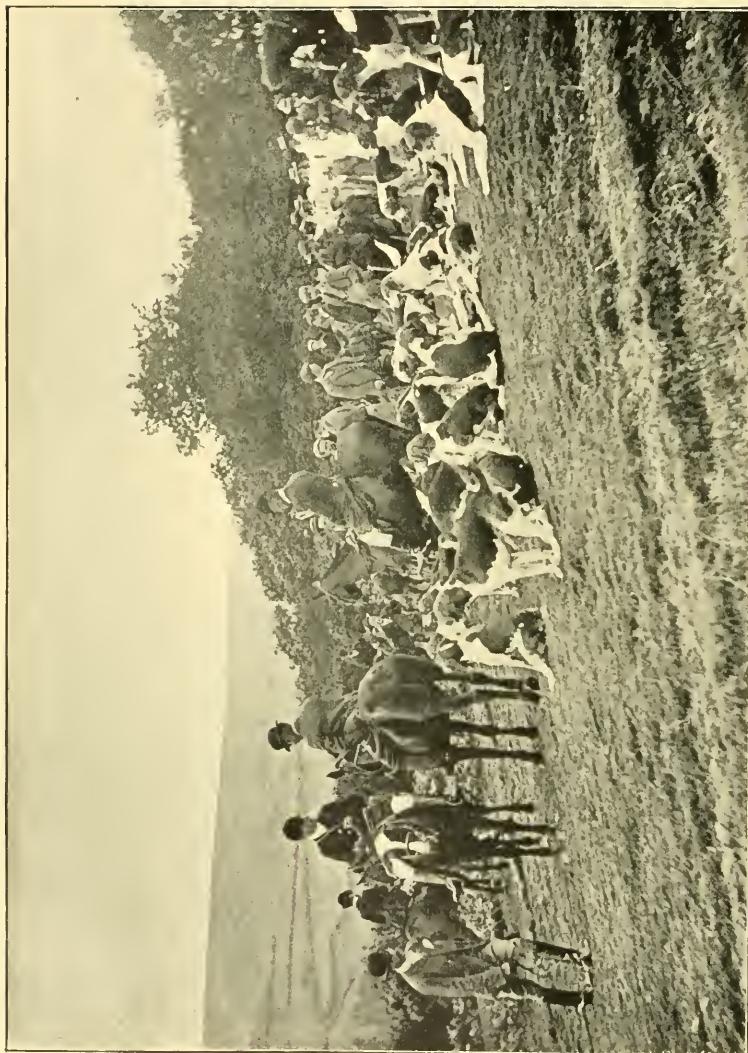
Steart Common from the fury of the winter gales. At this precise spot, the only road leading to the village of Steart has since been washed away by the encroachment of the sea, and the inhabitants have been cut off more or less from the rest of the world.

Midway between the Quantocks and the home country lies the town of Watchet, where a strange adventure once happened to a Slowley hind. While the pack was running another deer, a few hounds followed this lucky animal to the cliffs between Blue Anchor and Watchet, where she took to the sea, and swimming a long way out was eventually secured alive and none the worse for her immersion by certain Watchet boatmen. Instead of at once notifying the Hunt of her capture, these good men locked her up in safe quarters in the town, and proceeded to demand a ransom of four pounds, oblivious of the fact that all hunted deer are the property of the master. Negotiations ensued in the course of which the boatmen were duly informed of their false position, and were offered the usual recompense of half a sovereign for taking the hind. After some demur a compromise was effected for the sum of fifteen shillings, the hind to be delivered safe and well on a certain Monday morning, when a crate was to be sent for her conveyance to fresh fields and pastures

new. On the previous night, however, whether by accident or intention, her prison doors became unfastened, and mounting on a pile of alabaster, which is obtained in profusion from the neighbouring cliffs, she scaled the roof, and made good her escape from the scene of her troubles, and doubtless survived to attain a hoary old age. Excellent photographs were obtained of this hind while in captivity, and an ingenious use was made of one of the negatives so obtained to depict the hind in the act of escaping over the broken stable roof, where her tread cracked several slates, and the picture produced had every semblance of reality, although the actual escape took place by night.



THE MEET AT SLOWLEY : THE HARBOURER REPORTS TO THE MASTER.



CHAPTER XIII.

INCREASED SPEED—BLANCHING A STAG—SLOWLEY WOOD
—KINGSBRIDGE—THE MINERAL RAILWAY—THE STEART
STAG—TAME DEER—WAYS AND MEANS—THE VENISON
FEASTS—TIME-HONOURED CUSTOMS.



ALL the rules of staghunting are as different as possible from those of any other kind of hunting, and the deliberate consultations sometimes carried on

amongst the executive, when once a stag has been roused, often strikes a novice as one of the most unaccountable features of this unique sport. For several years past it has been so imperative to kill without mercy as many as possible of the beautiful animals, and that without particular regard to their having attained a warrantable age, that the good old custom of allowing each deer an ample law

has practically become a dead letter. No doubt heavy stags gave better runs in olden times, and would give better runs to-day if they could have half an hour's respite granted them, in which to make shift to shake off their enemies. That this would not invariably hold good, however, is sometimes seen in the case of heavy old stags, that trust so much to stratagem and so little to speed, that when the tufters are whipped off they betake themselves forthwith to the nearest thick covert, and splashing into the first convenient soiling pit, lie there at their ease until the whole body of the pack bursts in upon their retreat, fresh finds them in view, and their case becomes desperate indeed. To give a fox five minutes advantage on a sunburnt plain of heather, so dry and dusty that a carelessly thrown down match would instantly cause a prairie fire, would be to make sure of losing him, but with deer this is not so.

If modern foxhounds, chosen for their speed and beauty, do not possess perhaps all the nose and hunting power of their forerunners, that led less well mounted fields across the moor, they can at any rate get nearer to their deer, and in that way improve the scent. The pace and endurance of the deer too seems fully equal to the greater demands made on them by the dash and galloping power of

the hounds now used, and if the days be not as long and as tiring as formerly, they are, at any rate, quite long enough and hard enough for the greediest, and the chase of the wild red deer of Exmoor may be said, without reserve, to be the most severe and arduous of all forms of English sport carried on with horse and hound.

To those who have only hunted carted deer, it comes as a novel idea that the noble animal is killed when taken, and the author has often heard surprise expressed that such valuable animals should be converted into venison, with what appears to be at first sight reckless prodigality.

The reason why, however, of many doings that appear strange to the casual visitor to Exmoor, becomes evident after awhile, if the enquirer mixes with those who inhabit red deer land all the year round, and then by degrees it dawns upon him, that a large herd of red deer numbering several hundred, maintained in a cultivated country, is a tremendous tax on the loyalty and sportsmanlike feeling of an agricultural population, and that the death of the game is truly the life of the sport.

To give advice to professionals would seem to be the chief object in life of many a novice, and to offer loud mouthed criticism on rules that have stood the test of hundreds of years,

after an acquaintanceship with the sport of a few weeks only, seems to come natural to the townsman out for a holiday.

Human nature comes out wonderfully amongst the petty trials and dangers and discomforts of the hunting field, and if a man be naturally self assertive or quarrelsome or selfish, he is almost sure to show it when his outward veneer of good manners is rubbed off in the excitement of a quick thing over difficult ground. Any person, whether man or woman, who can be a true lady or gentleman throughout a long day's hunting, need never fear to find themselves in any circumstances or in any company. Blood will always tell, and education never fails to leave its mark, and the regular habitués of a hunt get to know each other more intimately perhaps than in any other form of society, being thrown together more often and for longer hours and under circumstances more trying to temper than in any other way.

There has been discussion without end as to the advisability of using firearms to despatch a deer that stands at bay in some spot where he or she cannot be immediately approached, and there are no doubt one or two occasions each season when the employment of such means would be merciful.

To lay down a hard and fast rule, however, that an arm of precision should always be called

into play in such cases, involves many difficulties which do not immediately strike the ordinary critic. With some French packs it is done, but the hounds do not always escape unharmed; then too to make good practice with a shaking hand at the end of an exciting chase must be by no means easy, and last but not least the employment of firearms in connection with deer in a country where they are so scrupulously preserved from the effect of villainous salt-petre would be repugnant in the highest degree to the large majority of those by whose goodwill they survive in their present state, and are maintained to be a worthy ornament of their native counties.

Level ground is very scarce in the country where these scenes are laid, up or down hill is the rule all day throughout the average run, and wherever the camera points, the figures it focusses are sure to be standing or moving on a slope of greater or less degree, or on a surface covered with irregularities. The deer know well how easily the undulations of the hill tops will hide them from the view of human beings, and they will quickly put a swell of the ground between themselves and any single horseman, but when the hills are dotted all over with pursuers they have nothing for it but to gallop right away.

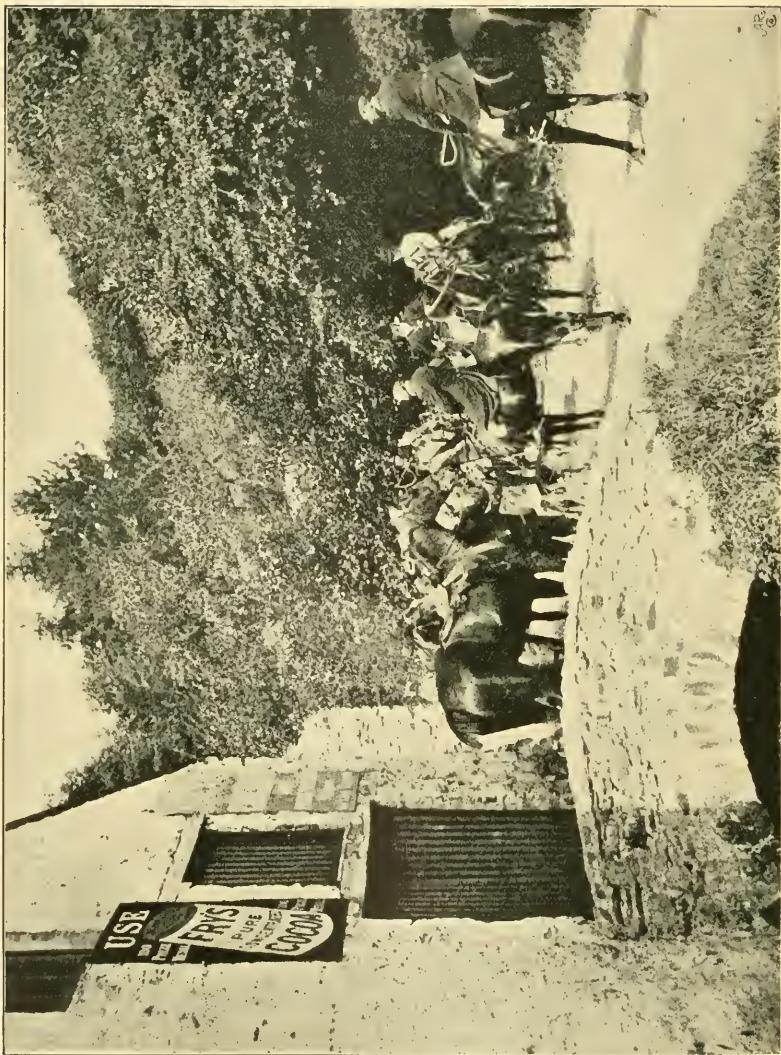
To blanch a stag is sometimes quite easy and at other times the whole field cannot do it, try they as manfully as they may, but the general rule seems to be, that when once a stag of warrantable age has made up his mind to strike out for a distant point, no amount of heading off will keep him from it, and again, if once confronted and turned back into a big woodland, he will be very chary of leaving it unless the whole hillside be left quite unoccupied and he be hard pressed by hounds within the covert. As with scent, however, rules cannot well be laid down for the behaviour of deer, the unexpected always happening. There seems to be a deep rooted conviction in the public mind that deer always take the same line from the same coverts, and when crossing any particular hill can be depended upon to make the same points. When deer were very scarce, and in the days when Mr. Bisset was restoring the sport and putting it on the footing from whence the present flourishing state of things has come, it may have been that stags roused in Horner always ran to Porlock Weir, or Sweeterly deer invariably made for Badgworthy, but many stags have many minds, and for one that now leads the pack exactly where he is expected to, half a dozen strike out a course of their own. This is, of course, as it should be, for a great part of the

charm of all hunting lies in the traversing of fresh and unexplored ground, where a way has to be found or made, and that without loss of time.

Along the top of Slowley Wood, there runs a green grass track, and by a certain thorn bush successive masters have taken their stand, to await the appearance of harboured stags, roused in the jungle below by the tufters. Here sooner or later if deer are plentiful in the wood, and they have been so for many years, there is sure to be a view at close quarters, but amongst so many acres of covert it may well happen that the tufters first rouse any animal but a warrantable one. A lusty male deer perhaps does the stag service by leading the pursuit astray, and not until he bounds out from the topmost fringe of the covert, can it be seen that he is not the real article. Then the tufters must be taken back and the quest resumed, and the huntsman's voice sounds fainter and more distant as he tries downwards amongst the endless thickets, where for acres and acres the ling grows up in luxuriant masses amongst the sheltering copse. Then, again, in the depths of greenery a hound challenges, and there follows a tell-tale rush and rattle that makes the bushes sway and nod their topmost twigs. But instead of bearing upwards to the open hill side where

he is anxiously awaited, this stag goes downwards to try some cool retreats he knows of in the valley woods below. Beneath some clusters of tall Scotch firs, dark foliaged and red stemmed, he stops stealthily to listen, for although he has heard much, and that unpleasantly near to him, he has seen nothing yet. In the instant that he turns, however, a good sportsman waiting with self denying patience in the roadway that winds up to Slowley Farm is rewarded for his zeal by catching a view of his noble proportions. Silently he waits till the approaching cry of the tufters makes the stag bound across the roadway to disappear in Drucombe Wood below. Then he lifts up his voice after the manner dear to all West Countrymen and staghunters, the tufters come bustling through the bushes with panting breath and eager eyes, the huntsman on his tufting pony comes rattling down a stony track, all waterworn and sprinkled with roots and boulders, and with every here and there a great heap of *débris* collected by the wood emmets. "What sort of a stag is he, Mr. Ridler?" "Oh, a rare good one, sure enough, with three atop on one horn, and I couldn't see what he had on the other." "Oh, he'll do then, will you please go up and tell the master on top, and I'll stop the tufters if he breaks away below, and wave my handkerchief for the pack." Ten minutes later the

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KINGSBRIDGE.

harvesters at work on the Treborough side begin to run and shout, and the horn can be heard going steadily away in the direction of Leatherbarrow. So the pack is trotted down to Kingsbridge and there rekennelled for awhile, till the whipper-in arrives with his horse in a lather, to report that all the hounds are stopped, and the stag has gone right away towards the line of the Mineral Railway.

Now when deer take this line, they completely alter the complexion of an ordinary Slowley day. Instead of stones there is grass, instead of bad scenting ground there is good country for hound work over the slopes of the Brendon Hills pointing southward, and instead of the Minehead and Porlock contingents finding themselves close home at the end of the day's work, it is the Dulverton folk who have cause to congratulate themselves. Straight in front and to the southward lie the Haddon strongholds, and as a first point to make the stag has the Withiel Florey stream, a strong attraction after his hurried ascent of Leatherbarrow. The disused Mineral Railway offers less of an obstacle than it did to the passing and repassing of deer between Haddon and Slowley, and is easily negotiated by them at various points. Three short miles down the Withiel Water brings the stag to the neighbourhood of Steart Cottage, where he has the

Countess of Carnarvon's woods all round him. But even so, the good feeding of Slowley has rendered him so fat and well liking that the pace has been too much for him. Instead of having strength left to climb to Haddon Hill, where some friendly hind might lead the eager hounds astray, he turns aside into a convenient orchard and lies down in the shelter of a ditch. Hounds overrun the mark, but on casting back the huntsman presently finds him, and his doom is quickly sealed. In the narrow waters of the Haddeo he can make no fight, no pool serves to set the hounds a swimming while he stands his ground, and before the field are well aware that the end of the chase is so near, he has been seized and despatched.

Of all the queer places that hunted deer have got into, the Roadwater roller mills was one of the most dangerous and inconvenient both to stag and hounds. Here a Slowley stag gave some very anxious moments to his captors, but by good fortune avoided the machinery in motion, and passed on into a stable where he was secured after an exciting tussle.

Another stag in the Slowley district, but which had run from Cloutsham on an opening day will be long remembered as having made his way into the dining room of Steart

House then occupied by the late Dr. S. P. Budd. The table was laid for dinner, and the stag cleared it at a bound, displacing one wine glass only in his leap. At the end of the room, he pulled up short with his back to the service door, and confronting the plate-glass mirror of the sideboard. Here, as if overcome by the apparition of a mirrored stag in front of him, he stood at gaze until secured.

Hinds make excellent pets, and can be reared from their youngest days with a little trouble, but in a country traversed by so many packs of hounds, where the sound of the horn can be heard on any still winter's day, tame deer are never quite free from danger, and sooner or later are very likely to come to an unfortunate end. Male deer invariably become troublesome, a well known instance of the early seventies being a male calf that was saved by the late Mr. W. Lyddon, of Edbrooke House, near Winsford, and became a great favourite, but even before he reached full size began to terrorize the women of the locality. So bold was he that he would follow Mr. Lyddon's waggon for miles along the road to Minehead and would return from thence by himself, quite unconcerned except at sight of a petticoat, when he would at once assume the offensive. Walking into the house at Edbrooke, he would

snatch morsels from the plates of guests seated at the table, but his boldness reached such a pitch that he came to an untimely end.

A former Secretary of the Hunt, the late Mr. S. Warren, kept a tame deer at his stables at The Mount, Dulverton, and this animal was wont to take its walks abroad, the stable doors being left open for it as a retreat in case of emergency. This plan answered well for a considerable time, but at length, on one unlucky day, the unfortunate animal was pursued by hounds and found the stable door accidentally closed, when his fate was sealed.

In other hunting countries, regulations have been made of late years tending to raise the minimum subscription which can be tendered by any regular follower, so as to enable the sport to be maintained on a suitable footing, and this principle has been accepted by the Hunt Committee of the Devon and Somerset, where the minimum subscription for a day's hunting with one horse has been fixed at half a guinea, and when the neighbouring packs meet within their borders it has been decided that their field should subscribe to the funds of the Exford establishment. While many hunting visitors subscribe liberally towards the sport they enjoy, there have undoubtedly been in times past a considerable number whose

donations have fallen far short of even this modest minimum, and when one considers that the casual tourist does not shrink from an outlay of two guineas a day on the stout hireling he bestrides, it seems indeed a moderate exaction to fix his contribution towards the upkeep of such a pack as he will find waiting for him at the meet, at such a figure as this, which will not add appreciably to the expenses of his sojourn in the West Country. To such a one it will probably not occur until, bitten with the sport, he repeats his visits again and again, that the maintenance of the Devon and Somerset in all their glory, entails not only the expenses incidental to any four days a week pack, but necessitates the provision of a large sum by way of compensation for the nightly ravages of over five hundred deer. harbouring and boats, and the carting and distributing of venison, are heavy items in the master's bill, such as do not fall to the lot of a master of foxhounds, and, in addition, the festive board is nobly spread at Porlock and at Dulverton for long lines of deer preserving farmers, who accept the master's invitation and assemble in great force to do justice to a smoking haunch. These same venison feasts are matters of long established custom, and the old routine is ceremoniously followed.

At the high table, the master takes the

chair, supported on either hand by members of the hunt committee, and masters of other packs, and an occasional hunting visitor. The Church, the Law, Physic, and the Press are generally represented, and after grace the company fall to with right good will, with which is mingled the satisfaction of knowing that the fast diminishing haunch, that made the board groan when it was first set on, will fatten no more at the expense of the eaters' turnips, will browse no more upon the ripening corn, no more will tear the juicy mangolds from the ground to throw them bitten and destroyed all over the disordered field at home. Many other seasonable dainties tempt the appetite of those who cannot face roast venison, and there are such even in the wild West Country, and when at length the last course has been cleared away, a mighty bowl of steaming punch, curiously concocted and very potent withal, is placed before the master, with a long handled silver ladle and many punch glasses. When these have been duly filled and handed round, and the customary toasts have been disposed of, the master proceeds to the toast of the evening, and gives "Prosperity to Staghunting," seizing the opportunity to refer to the sport enjoyed throughout the season, and to touch on any striking incidents which may have occurred since last the toast was given.

Some musical member of the company is then called upon by the master to oblige with a song, and many singers have sung the same song with unfailing popularity year after year on these occasions. The honorary secretary is next entrusted with the toast of the "Owners of coverts and the occupiers of land," and he couples with it the names of three or four representatives of the larger estates present. The persons named, after due deliberation, reply, and then the singer of the last song exercises his right of call by inviting some other tuneful guest to promote the harmony of the evening. It is worthy of remark that etiquette seems to require a not too hurried compliance with the request for a song, and until recent years it was apparently more fashionable to sing sitting down than standing up, and at the conclusion of the song it was, and is, *de rigueur* to give its title. An especially popular song is acknowledged by jumping to the feet, glass in hand, with the remark, "Your health and song, Sir."

The names of such songs as the "The Marking Iron," "The Ivy and the Myrtle" and "The Tarpaulin Jacket" will recall memories of bygone feasts to many a staghunter.

Sitting down about six o'clock, the high table rises as soon as the toast list has been disposed of with the usual songs and a

vice-chairman then continues the sitting for another hour or so.

On the following night the "Town and Trade" of such places is entertained by the hotel keeper who catered for the master's feast, and the remains of the haunch do duty for a second festive night, when the fun is apt to wax fast and furious.

With the recurrence of the October venison feasts, the seasons, as they come around with each revolving year, draw near to a close, and with this sketch of a time honoured hill country custom this work must come to end. Covering the years from 1887 to 1901, it touches on events not hitherto described, except in cursory form, and strives to bring home by the aid of the photographic studies how the Devon and Somerset Staghounds look to-day amid the beautiful surroundings of their moorland home.

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